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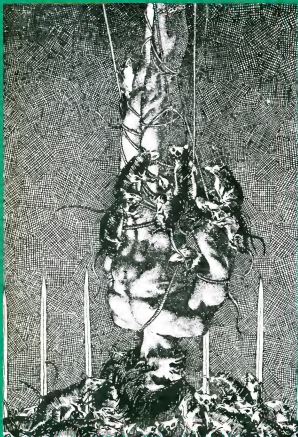
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MAGAZINE OF  
**HORROR**

**BIZARRE**

**FRIGHTENING**

**GRUESOME**



**THE  
MONSTERS**

by MURRAY  
LEINSTER

**THE SIREN OF  
THE SNAKES**

by ARLTON  
EADIE

**ONLY GONE  
BEFORE**

by EMIL  
PETAJA

G. G. KETCHAM  
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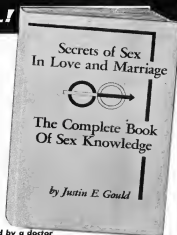
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# magazine of **HORROR**

## **The Bizarre and The Unusual**

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*Volume 4*

*CONTENTS FOR MARCH*

*Number 2*

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COVER .....	<i>Virgil Finlay</i>	
THE EDITOR'S PAGE .....		6
THE SIREN OF THE SNAKES .....	<i>Arlton Eadie</i>	8
THE RACK .....	<i>G. G. Ketcham</i>	23
A CRY FROM BEYOND .....	<i>Victor Rousseau</i>	28
ONLY GONE BEFORE .....	<i>Emil Petaja</i>	48
THE RECKONING .....		60
THE VOICE .....	<i>Nell Kay</i>	61
THE MONSTERS(novelet).....	<i>Murray Leinster</i>	78
IT IS WRITTEN (Your Comments & Our Replies) .....		120
READERS' PREFERENCE PAGE (double-barrelled) . . . .		129/130

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**Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor**

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**The Author  
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## The Editor's Page

The 1920s saw an upsurge of interest in psychical research, an aftermath to the horrors and deaths of the Great War, aided by the conviction of such world-famous figures as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge (to mention just two) that the fundamental claims of the Spiritualists were true: that it was possible to communicate with persons we call "dead" because life is continuous and when each immortal spirit leaves the shell of the body that it inhabited here on Earth it continues in a different plane of existence—not a "heaven" or "hell" according to Dante (or any church teachings)—picking up exactly where it left off on Earth. And that certain of such persons are eager to communicate with persons still in Earthly "overcoats", as often called, and can do so through various means.

A couple of these means are the ouija board and the table-tapping seance, the latter under the guidance of a sensitive or "medium" who, in light or deep trance becomes a channel for the communicating spirit or spirits. Ouija boards sold like mad during this period, and the public, believing or not, certainly become "ghost-conscious". (Contemporary Spiritualists, by the way, will have nothing to do with ouija boards, or any other means of communication, without a trained medium; they contend that this is on a level with parlor psychoanalysis and very dangerous—something we can possibly agree with whether we accept their claims in regard to trained mediums

or not. Unsupervised automatic writing on the part of the amateur is also warned against, and I have noticed that many thoroughly materialistic psychotherapists, psychologists, etc., concur that it is dangerous.)

It was in this atmosphere that Bernarr Macfadden brought out the magazine *GHOST STORIES*, as a companion to *TRUE DETECTIVE MYSTERIES* and a rival to Hugo Gernsback's *AMAZING STORIES*, in 1926. For a fuller account of the Macfadden-Gernsback rivalry, and its bizarre conclusion in 1929, see Sam Moskowitz's article on Hugo Gernsback in *Explorers of the Infinite* (World Publishers; now available in soft covers at \$1.95); fascinating as it is, it just isn't relevant here. Although I cannot prove it, my own feeling now is that Macfadden waited too long to inaugurate *GHOST STORIES*. He should have done it three or four years earlier; and the ideal time to have launched the magazine would have been 1919, the way I see it. By 1926, the "spiritualist" fad (I refuse to use a capital "S" because hardly any of it had anything to do with genuine Spiritualism, which deserves fair treatment whether you accept its tenets or not) was on the decline; exposing spurious mediums was the new sport, and there was a good supply of them.

Be that as it may, not having the benefits of hindsight, Macfadden took the surface indications—that there was an expanding market for a "true supernatural" magazine—at their face value, and launched his new roto magazine, filled with trick photography that looked very convincing to the uninformed, easily impressed, and very young. Looking

through some of the old issues today, it is painfully obvious how "staged" many of the photographic illustrations are; but some of the trick apparitions still look effective, and I can remember quite vividly how effective they appeared to an imaginative ten-year-old at the time. And the journalistic, "true story" approach of the stories was certainly convincing to the inexperienced!

With the August 1928 issue, *GHOST STORIES* changed from roto to pulp paper, in the standard pulp magazine size. It was a shock and a big disappointment to me, for it seemed that the magazine had lost most of its appeal. What I could not know then, but which you may have deduced at once, is that this indicated that *GHOST STORIES* was in trouble; circulation was down to the point where Macfadden could no longer afford to issue the magazine in the fancy roto format—but was willing to see if it could make its way as a pulp. Later on, some time in 1929, the large size was restored, but not the roto paper and the photos; finally, the title passed into the hands of Harold Hershey, and the final issue was dated October-November 1931.

What made the roto issues of *GHOST STORIES* unique, and something more than just a rival to *Weird Tales* (which had been finally established as a standard-size pulp magazine, under the editorship of Farnsworth Wright, by the time *GS* first appeared) was the completely

journalistic approach. Since every story was supposed to be a "true experience", all quite naturally were told in the first person, and in many instances as artlessly as possible. (The serials had more elaborate plots.) It may be that a few actual "true experiences" were used, or that the professional writers were selected to "write up" the contributions of readers at times. At the present moment, I have only one copy of the roto series at hand; eight out of twelve of the stories are "by" so-and-so, as told to a professional writer; the contents page lists only the author.

In the later pulp days, after the large size had been restored, some acknowledged fiction began to appear in the magazine—such as *The Hand*, by Theodore Dreiser, *The Woman's Ghost Story*, by Algernon Blackwood, *Dey Ain't No Ghosts*, by Ellis Parker Butler, *The Messenger*, by Robert W. Chambers, etc.—but the pretense of presenting true stories was maintained.

The journalistic approach can and has brought forth good fiction, but it has its limitations, and literary excellence was never an aim of the publisher in the first place. Nonetheless, an occasional effective story did appear; we ran one, *Medium For Justice*, by Victor Rousseau, in the Spring 1967 (#4) issue of *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. The response indicated that you would like to see an occasional sample of this material. RAWL

# The Siren Of The Snakes

by Arlton Eadie

Between *Flames of Destiny* in the March 1928, and *The Wolf-Girl of Josselin* in the August 1938 issues of *WEIRD TALES*, ARLTON EADIE had 23 appearances in the magazine, bringing his total up to 25. While not one of the top favorites among the readers, Eadie was generally more liked than disliked, and now and then one of his better tales was very much liked. His tales show a wide range of subject matter, and the present example was justly appreciated by the readers when it was first published.

"LIVE FOR EVER, O protector of the poor! *Salaam*, O favored of Allah! Art thou my father and my mother?"

One does not need to be long in command of a Gurkha battalion, occupying a frontier fort, before discovering that, when a Him-

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for *WEIRD TALES*, June; no record of separate renewal.



alayan hillman starts addressing you in this strain, he intends to ask you to do him a favor. Knowing that as the assistant commissioner I was expected by the powers that be to act as judge, law-giver, policeman and general adviser to all to all and sundry, I resigned myself to the inevitable and summoned the Gurkha *bavidar* to act as interpreter. This man, Ramzan Mar by name, possessed the gift of tongues in no small degree; there was not a hill-dialect throughout the whole of Hindu-Koh of which he did not have at least a working knowledge. He possessed another gift which, in a native, is even more rare and precious—that of brevity. He ruthlessly divested the narrative of all those endless repetitions and flowers of speech so dear to the native heart, and presented me with the gist as follows:

The man was a messenger from a tiny village situated among the foothills about six miles to the east, and had "come before the *sahib's* face" to solicit aid in putting a stop to the depredations of some denizen of the surrounding jungles.

I can assure you that I grew interested when Ramzan's translation reached this point. One of the compensations of being quartered amid the somewhat desolate mountains which form the northern bulwarks of Hindustan is that they contain hunting-grounds

which may be classed among the finest in the world. Ibex, burrel, gazelles, chamois, and antelopes abound. Nor are the more formidable *ferae naturae* lacking; with patience—and luck—one might get a shot at a leopard or prowling tiger, and I at once surmised that it was some such animal that was causing the trouble. But it turned out I was wrong:

"It is not a tiger, *sahib*," Ramzan translated, after the man had replied to my question. "He says it is a gigantic python."

"A python?—a man-eating python?" I cried in amazement, my interest now at fever-heat. Many were the stories I had heard of the terrible power possessed by these huge reptiles, which, although lacking the poison-fangs common to the majority of Indian snakes, are nevertheless as much dreaded as any viper or cobra. They rely upon their immense power of muscular contraction to overcome their prey, encircling the victim in their deadly folds and crushing it to a pulp before swallowing it whole. But I had certainly never heard of an instance where one had deliberately attacked a village, and I made no secret of the fact that I was somewhat skeptical.

When Ramzan translated my doubts to the man they evoked a perfect torrent of protestations, ac-

accompanied by abundant excited gestures.

"What's he getting annoyed about?" I inquired.

"He says it is no ordinary snake, *sahib*," the Gurkha answered. "It is a fiend—a devil—a beast of Satan—into which the spirit of some long-dead witch has entered. Nobody in the village is safe from it. At first it attacked only the goats and sheep; but now it lies in wait among the terraced rice-fields and springs upon the women as they work. It enters the very huts. . . ."

"That will do," I interrupted, as I rose to my feet and made my way toward the quarters occupied by my second in command.

Gordon Meldreuth was in years but little more than a boy, having been drafted to the regiment when he passed out of Sandhurst a couple of years previously. He was a handsome, likeable young fellow and, having many tastes in common, we had got on remarkably well together. He was as keen on big-game hunting as I was myself, and his face lit up with pleasure when I explained the situation to him.

"Of course I shall be only too pleased to come with you, sir," he cried, his eyes roaming round the trophies of the chase with which his room was decorated; from the leopardskin beneath his feet to the magnificent inarkhor horns above

the mantelpiece. "I should like to add a sizable python to the list of my conquests!"

Returning to the orderly-room, I was able to send the messenger away happy with the assurance that on the morrow the two English *sahibs* would, Allah willing, effectually rid his village of the terror which beset it.

RAMZAN MAR accompanied us when we rode down the winding road from the fort at day-break the following morning, starting thus early in order to get the business over before the heat of the day began.

The Nepalese mountaineers, from whom the Gurkha regiments are recruited, bear the well-deserved reputation of being as good *shikarees* as they are soldiers—which is saying a good deal for their abilities in the hunting line—and Ramzan was no exception to the rule. He was a grave, taciturn man, short in stature as are all his race, and his squat brown features would have undoubtedly failed to win any but a consolation prize at a beauty show. But he was a perfect cragsman, an excellent stalker and an adept in woodcraft generally, being as active and wary as a wildcat. On our arrival at the village he at once set about commandeering the services of all the able-bodied inhabitants to assist as beaters in the chase.

One of the villagers, who had been out early gathering wild honey, had seen the python lying in a deep *nullah*, or gorge, with high, precipitous banks partly clothed in long *nurkal*-grass. So our forces were at once marshaled for the drive in the manner which Ramzan thought best. While the small army of beaters was proceeding to the head of the head of the *nullah*, Meldreuth and I set off on foot to take up a position on a rocky promontory at the farther end, overlooking a spot where the python would have to pass. Scarcely had we arrived there, when there broke out a hideous chorus of whoops, yells and whistles as the beaters dashed into the other end of the gorge like a pack of fox-hounds. I well knew, however, that this ostentatious display of zeal resulted more from the prevailing idea that the greater row each man made the less chance there would be of the python coming near him than from any eagerness in the pursuit.

Nearer and nearer came the din, until it sounded but a hundred yards or so from where we crouched with ready rifles. Then it became apparent that Ramzan's woodcraft was not at fault. The reed-like *nurkal*-grass round the edge of the little rocky clearing below was gently parted and through it emerged the flat, wicked-looking head of the python.

"Hold thy fire, *sahib*," whispered Ramzan, who had appeared as silently as a ghost behind us. "Wait till he is well out in the open."

I nodded my head to show that I heard his advice, and my finger took the "first pressure" on the trigger as the reptile began to emerge. It was in no hurry, however, in spite of the uproar behind it. An age seemed to pass before the entire length of its body became visible; but when it was fully revealed I could not help a slight gasp of astonishment escaping me.

Never in the whole course of my Indian experience had I even so much as heard tell of such a gigantic creature. The girth of the largest part of its body must have been at least three feet and its length at least thirty. By those who have only seen a python in a cage at the Zoological Society's Gardens, or a stuffed specimen in a museum, it may perhaps be thought that the mosaic-like markings of brilliant orange, brown and black would render it a conspicuous enough object; but, actually, the very reverse is the case. As the creature wound its sinuous way among the small boulders and clumps of sun-dried grass, it harmonized admirably with the color of its surroundings. Those seemingly conspicuous black stripes so nearly resembled the shadows cast by the stones and grass-stems that,

had the python remained motionless, it would have been extremely difficult to detect its presence.

But I had little time in which to admire this example of nature's protective coloring. The python was now in the center of the clearing—it seemed almost impossible to miss. I took careful aim along the sights and gently squeezed the final pressure on my trigger. At the same moment Gordon Meldreuth fired.

That python seemed to bear a charmed life! I saw the flash of my explosive bullet as it impinged on the rocks a few inches from the creature's head. Meldreuth was using solid, but the sharp *thud* of his bullet on the stones, instead of the unmistakable dull *plop* which it makes on striking flesh, told the same tale of an inglorious miss.

"*Ne lugga!* (missed him)," whispered Ramzan in a tone of bitter disappointment; then—"Quick, *sahib!* Shoot again before he is out of sight."

Once more our rifles spoke. But by this time the now thoroughly alarmed reptile had so changed its position that the sun was shining directly into our eyes, making accurate sighting difficult. Whether it was due to this fact, or to the feelings of exasperation at our first bungling, I know not. The only thing I am certain of is that, so far as injuring the python was con-

cerned, we might have been merely pelting him with pebbles. Fortunately for the chase, however, his progress was now over fairly open ground, so that we could catch an occasional glimpse of his body as it wound in and out amid the boulders. He seemed to be making directly toward a spot on the left bank of the *nullah* where the sheer limestone cliff rose in a kind of natural dome, at the base of which—in spite of our efforts to head him off—he at length disappeared.

"*Shabash!* (bravo)," cried Ramzan, pointing to the numerous well-defined tracks among the beaten grass, showing the trails were frequently used. "We have him now, *sahib*. This is his lair."

As usual, the *shikaree* wasted but little time in words. Drawing his *kookerie*—that heavy curved knife which is a characteristic part of the Gurkhas' equipment, and which they are in the habit of using as much for domestic as for fighting purposes—he at once set to work hacking away the undergrowth around the place where the python had gone to earth. Presently he paused in his task and beckoned me to approach.

ONE GLANCE WAS sufficient to show me that the place where the python had taken refuge was no natural fissure in the rock. The entrance was an arched doorway, richly decorated with native

sculptures, the weather-worn appearance of which seemed to indicate an extreme antiquity. Immediately above the lintel was a large statue, which at first glance I thought was supposed to represent a mermaid. Closer inspection, however, convinced me that I was looking upon an idol of a Hindoo goddess, Naga-Kanya, the Snake Princess, who, half snake, half woman, is still worshipped by thousands of devotees.

"Why, this must be one of those old cave-temples dedicated to the snake-goddess, of which I have heard so much," cried Gordon Mel-dreuth; adding with a laugh, "Well, Mister Python has certainly sought sanctuary in an appropriate spot!"

I noticed Ramzan's eyes narrow suddenly at the words. As befits a true son of the prophet, he was accustomed to profess a supreme contempt for every brand of superstition not orthodox to his own faith. But the villagers themselves made no secret of their feelings. They hung back, gathering into knots and talking eagerly in low, awed tones, occasionally casting terrified glances at the statue over the cave-door. It was clear that the fact of the python seeking refuge in the Temple of Naga-Kanya presented itself as no mere coincidence to their minds.

By this time the brushwood was entirely cleared away from the

entrance, and Ramzan sheathed his *kookerie* and looked inquiringly at me.

Now, I do not mind admitting that had I been alone I should have given up the hunt there and then; for the prospect of seeking the python in its lair sent a tingling sensation down my spine merely to think of it. But I knew that the eyes of the whole crowd were upon me watching for the least sign of funk in the English *sahib*. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to unsling my rifle and make toward the cave with such outward appearance of determination as I could assume.

The interior of the place was lit by a dim half-light, which filtered through a creeper-grown aperture high up in one of the walls. Pausing a few seconds to allow my eyes to grow accustomed to the semi-obscurity, I advanced step by step, my rifle held ready in my hands, searching the shadows on either side for some sign of the python. I breathed more freely when I had arrived opposite the gap through which the light entered, for here one could at least see the surrounding objects with tolerable distinctness; and here, to my unbounded surprise, I perceived evidence that at some period or other the cavern must have been occupied by a human being. A kind of rude couch of skins stood in one corner, together with a few

earthenware vessels of primitive manufacture.

I had, however, but little time in which to take in the full significance of these details, for at that moment I became aware of two small points of light shining amid the inky blackness of the farther end of the cavern. They were the eyes of the python, intently watching my every movement!

FOR PERHAPS A full minute I stood stock-still, gazing at those two specks of greenish fire. Then — it may have been my imagination, or merely the natural effect of the straining of my own eyes in the darkness, but it seemed as if those bright, watching eyes were getting larger — nearer — that the python was silently writhing its way toward me as I stood.

Who has not heard of the hypnotic effect of a snake's direct gaze? Many were the accounts I had heard of that strange, uncanny power — heard and disbelieved — but at that moment I was on the point of receiving positive and practical proof of the matter. I felt a sense of mental numbness stealing over me; all danger seemed to be forgotten in a dreamy speculation as to what would happen next; all power of making effort seemed to be paralyzed. It appeared that there was no other course open to me but to wait there, silent, motionless, for the inevitable.

Then some flicker of my fast-expiring consciousness warned me of the peril in which I stood — that unless I roused myself and threw off the fatal lethargy, I was lost. Blindly, mechanically — almost, I may say, unconsciously — I raised my rifle and let drive with both barrels.

Fortunately the distance which separated us was so short that a miss was impossible. The two points of fire were extinguished as though they had been snuffed out by an invisible hand, and the next instant the cave was filled with the violent contortions of the reptile's coils in their last death-throes.

Scarcely had the smoke from the double discharge cleared away, when I saw another pair of eyes gleaming from the opposite corner. Heavens! I had penetrated into a perfect nest of pythons?

Even as the thought crossed my mind I was conscious of something brushing across my cheek. Whether it was some large moth, or dark-loving bat disturbed by the noise of my shots, I did not pause to consider. Without even waiting to reload my rifle, I turned tail and — well, let us call it, "retreated with all speed."

"Two of them?" cried Gordon Meldreuth, when I had explained what had happened.

I nodded. "I have accounted for one."

"And the other is coming out now. Listen!" he interrupted.

A slight, vague noise was approaching toward the mouth of the cavern, and something appeared indistinctly in the gloom. In a flash Meldreuth had thrown his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hold!" cried Ramzan Mar suddenly, knocking up his weapon so that it exploded harmlessly in the air. "That is no python, *sahib*."

THE *SHIKAREE'S* quick sense of hearing had not deceived him. A second later, to our unbounded amazement, there advanced into the sunlight a young girl, slight, graceful and well-formed.

So unexpected was her appearance that for a space in which one might count a hundred nobody moved or spoke. We stood—the beaters, Ramzan, Meldreuth and myself—like men suddenly frozen into stone, staring at the girl as she slowly advanced toward us.

She was not a native—or if she were she belonged to a caste with which I was unacquainted. Her skin was as light as any European's, and her features, framed in masses of waving black hair were of an almost classical regularity. In their flawless perfection they resembled more the ideal sculptures of ancient Greece than a creature of flesh and blood. Her tall, supple form was draped in

the folds of a strange iridescent garment; formed, I subsequently noted, out of the semi-transparent cast skins of snakes, and over her rounded bosom there fell a long necklace composed of the threaded teeth of the same reptile.

As we stood there, amazed and wondering, there came a yell of terror from the beaters, and with one accord they took to their heels, shouting out some unintelligible gibberish as they disappeared in the jungle.

"What are the fools shouting about?" Meldreuth asked, impatiently addressing Ramzan Mar.

"They say that this maiden is Naga Kanya, the goddess of the snakes—she who crushes the life out of mortal men with her embrace or poisons them with her kiss, O *sahib*," the Gurkha answered. Although the man endeavored to infuse into his reply some of his customary contempt, I could see by the expression on his usually impassive face that his mind was not entirely at ease.

But Gordon Meldreuth only laughed aloud. "The fools fear that she will crush them in her embrace, do they?" he cried, his eyes fixed on the graceful figure before him. Then he laughed again. "Well, one might die a far less pleasant death than that!"

NIGHT—AN INDIAN night. Not the windless, stifling night

of the Plains, which seems but a brief spell of heat-laden darkness between two baking days, but a night amid the upper slopes of the Himalayas; where the wind, cooled over miles of glaciers, fills the lungs with its icy, exhilarating breath.

The moon had just topped the crests of the distant crags rising along the ridge of eternal snow, and was lighting up such a sublimely grand prospect of fell, forest and flood as could hardly be surpassed the world over. Our fort was set on a broad, jutting spur of rock commanding the pass below. On either side the mountains rose in rugged precipices, rocky amphitheaters, and gigantic buttresses toward the naked peaks which stood out in grand yet awful magnificence against the silvery sky. Glaciers lay in the hollows between some of the higher spurs, while broad fields of virgin snow filled the head of the main valley. To the right, so near that the wind drifted the spray across the angles of the narrow, winding path leading up to the gate of the fort, there fell from above a foaming torrent which roaring sullenly below, filled the valley with its deep, never-ending resonance. Farther down, the steep mountainsides were dark with vast tracks of somber-hued deodar forests rent here and there by long lines of uprooted and splintered trees, masses of earth-

soiled snow and debris marking the course of avalanches which had swept from the towering heights above.

Such was the prospect spread out before me as I leaned over the stone parapet of the fort, smoking and musing over the events of the day. We had returned to the fort about nightfall, the mysterious girl accompanying us. I had been desirous of leaving her at the village in the foothills; but when we called there on our way back, the inhabitants resolutely refused to allow her to enter, finally backing up their refusal with volleys of stones and curses.

"Take the snake-witch from our doors, O *sahib*," they had shouted. "Are we weary of our lives that we should give shelter to Naga-Kanya, the daughter of death and destruction? Take her hence, O *sahib*, or we will surely slay her."

After that there was no alternative but to lodge her in the fort until I could have her sent under escort down the Rotang Pass to Sultanpur, where she would be in safe and kindly hands at the mission-home.

Who was this girl? Where did she come from? By what train of extraordinary circumstances had she been enabled to enter, unharmed, into that python-haunted temple of the snake-goddess? Meldreuth and I had discussed these questions over dinner without arriving



at any satisfactory solution. Nor could the Gurkha sergeant Ramzan Mar enlighten us. He had questioned her in every one of the hill dialects without eliciting the least sign of understanding. As to the language which she herself spoke, Ramzan emphatically called upon Allah and the Prophet to witness that he had never before heard it spoken. One word she had repeated many times, "Vasantasena," at the same time pointing to herself. This, we assumed, was her name; for when we uttered the strange sibilant syllables she would nod and smile as though pleased. At the same time I noted that her smiles were sunniest when it was the young and handsome Gordon Meldreuth who spoke her name. She seemed to attach herself to him as a matter of course; for such a grizzled old veteran as myself she had scarcely a second glance.

A QUICK STEP ON the concrete flagging of the courtyard roused me from my revery. It was Gordon Meldreuth. As he came toward me, carrying his topee in his hand, as though to let the cool night breeze play on his uncovered head, the moonlight fell full upon his face. Maybe the cold white rays deceived my eyes, but it seemed to me as if his features were as colorless as marble and that his usually bright eyes were dull and troubled.

"I've warned the men who are

to form the escort tomorrow, sir," he reported. When do they parade?"

"At daybreak," I answered. "We at least owe it to the girl to get her as soon as possible to a place where she will be well looked after by sympathetic persons of her own sex. Then it may be discovered who she is and where she comes from."

"Yes," Meldreuth said, after a long pause. "Perhaps it will be best. Poor Vasantasena!"

I half turned and, under pretense of knocking the ash from my cigar, flashed a quick look into the young officer's face. There had been such a wealth of wistful tenderness in his voice as he uttered the sibilant accents of her strange name—a name which somehow vaguely suggested the hissing of a snake—that the suspicion which had been forming in my mind for the past few hours now flashed into sudden certainty.

"Yes," I repeated, this time in a tone of grim conviction. "It certainly is best that she should leave here."

If he noticed the irony of my utterance he gave no sign. For awhile he remained silently gazing at the distant moonlit peaks; then

he passed his hand wearily across his forehead and laughed unsteadily.

"I'm not subject to nerves, sir, as you know"—he spoke with that constrained awkwardness of a man imparting a confidence of which he is half ashamed—"but tonight I have an unaccountable foreboding of coming calamity. If we were on the verge of a big push I could understand the feeling. But all is quiet on the frontier—yet death seems to hover in the very air."

I was now staring at the man in genuine astonishment. Had I not seen him dozens of times under heavy fire, and had I not known him for once of the coolest officers under my command, I should have thought he was suffering from funk—which was absurd. Yet here he was talking about "forebodings" like any nervous schoolgirl. He must have guessed what was passing in my mind, for:

"I know it sounds like so much absolute rot, sir," he said with a laughing shrug, "but the feeling is there all the same. I wouldn't have spoken of it, only we've been something more to each other than mere messroom acquaintances, and—if anything should happen to me—I want you to look after"—again his voice grew softer as he uttered the name—"Vasantasena."

"Of course I'll do my best for the girl," I rejoined, somewhat impatiently. "But what is likely to

happen to you? The hill tribes are quiet. What danger . . ."

"Hullo! What's up with the sentry?"

Meldreuth broke in suddenly with the words as he pointed to the Gurkha on guard. The man had come to a halt at the farther angle of the parapet, and although he had not challenged, was looking intently at something directly below. In a moment we had hurried to his side.

"What is it sentry!" I asked.

The man straightened up, came to the slope, and saluted before he answered:

"A snake *sahib*. There—on the path below. And there is another—and another! By Allah! every snake in the mountains hath come at the call of that accursed witch-girl!"

EXTRAORDINARY AS THE assertion sounded, it certainly seemed as if it were true. The rays of the full moon lit up the landscape below until it appeared like a model carved in shimmering silver. By its light, almost as clear as day, we beheld a terrifying sight. From the dark forests of deodar-cedar, from the boulders lining the zigzag path to the fort, from the thickets of grass and reeds bordering the rushing stream—from every scrap of cover, it seemed—there emerged an ever-increasing multitude of creeping things.

Huge pythons, hooded cobras, slender whip-snakes, deadly puff-adders—every poisonous and loathsome thing that crawls was there—all forming one wave of hideous gliding death—all converging to the path which led up to the fort in which we stood.

"Guard . . . turn out! Bugler, sound 'Fall in'."

Meldreuth rapped out the orders smartly. There was no hint of nervousness about him now. In spite of his recent talk about premonitions, here, in the face of actual danger, he was ice-cool.

"Machine-gunners—to your emplacements . . . Rifles, line the parapet. Bombers, make ready! . . . Point-blank range—independent firing. Take your own time, men, and let 'em have it hot. Rapid . . . load!"

For one brief second there sounded the faint metallic clicking as the cartridge-clips were pressed into the magazines and the breech-bolts thrust home. The next instant the peaceful stillness of the valley gave place to a pandemonium of hell. The fort had only two small guns belonging to a mule battery, but what we lacked in artillery was amply made up for in small arms and bombs. The quick rattle of the rifles; the sustained whirring of the machine-guns; the sharp bark of the little nine-pounders; the dull thudding explosions of the Mills' bombs—all combined to make up

a devil's harmony difficult indeed to surpass.

Such was the mass of reptiles wedged in the gorge below that every shot must have told. But their numbers seemed endless. As fast as one rank of the mass was blown into writhing fragments, another advanced to take its place. The little white path was now black with the reptiles, living and dead. But in spite of the appalling hail of lead showered upon it, that nightmare host crept nearer and ever nearer to the gate of the fort.

"Steady, men. Keep cool and fire low. Gunners, concentrate on the head of the column."

And so the conflict went on; and a more fierce or fantastic one was never waged on this planet—and probably never will be.

"*Sahib*—Meldreuth *sahib*!"

So engrossed had I been in the scene before me that I had all this time scarcely given a thought to the girl Vasantasena. But as these words fell on my ear, uttered in a soft whisper, the memory of the strange circumstances under which we had found her rushed back to my mind. I remembered the superstitious awe in which the natives held her—her dress of pythons' skins—her home in the den—and the horde of snakes which now beset us. Small wonder was it that my brain was in a confused whirl as I turned round at the sound of

her voice, speaking, for the first time, intelligible words.

THE JUNGLE GIRL WAS standing immediately in the rear of the firing-line. Her hair was unloosened, flowing about her breast and shoulders and showing up their gleaming whiteness against its raven hue. Her eyes were shining with excitement; her lips parted in a smile—it seemed of triumph. Her lissom form was swaying, undulating, like some graceful palm shaker in the wind—or like some serpent about to strike. . .

"Meldreuth *sahib*," again she uttered his name; and yet again: "Meldreuth!"

I saw the boy turn and for a space look into her deep, compelling eyes; standing like a man fascinated—entranced. Then he took a step forward and caught the swaying figure in his arms.

"There is no danger . . ." he began: but his voice died away and a look of wonder came into his face. For her slender white arms had enfolded themselves about his neck; her lithe body pressed close to his. Nearer and nearer came the two faces—the boy's flushed, half puzzled; the girl's pale, coldly triumphant—her eyes never for an instant quitting his—until at last their lips were pressed together in a lingering, passionate kiss.

"*Bismallah!* The snakes are at the gate!"

The frenzied shout from the parapet caused me to turn my eyes. It was true. About the one slender barrier which stood between the teeming horde and ourselves there was piled a mass of reptiles—I heard the timbers creak and groan beneath their weight. Bombs were useless now—they would only serve to blow in our own defenses. I shouted the order for the rifles to take up their position on the towers flanking the gate, and began to lead the way. But I had not taken a couple of strides before a terrible cry, coming from behind, caused me to stop dead.

Gordon Meldreuth was still on the same spot where I had last seen him, but instead of being in the embrace of Vasantasena he was now struggling in the coils of an immense python!

Heaven alone knows by what means it had gained access to the fort; nor was there time even to consider such a matter. With the rapidity of a whirling whiplash, the rest of the creature's body wrapped itself round his legs, throwing him to the ground.

Even in the brief second that I stood fumbling with the flap of my revolver-holster I saw the terrible coils contract, and heard the sound—such as I never wish to hear again—as the bone-crushing pressure was exerted.

Revolver in hand, I dashed forward.



(illustration by T. Wyatt Nelson)

But Ramzan Mar was readier than I. He appeared as if by magic by the side of the pair in that devil's embrace, and raised his rifle until it almost touched the reptile's head. Then came a sudden flash of fire — a sharp report — and the hideous head disappeared — blown into space by the near discharge.

Snatching a *kookerie* from the belt of the nearest man, I assisted Ramzan in hacking asunder the still palpitating coils of the python, until at last we had poor Meldreuth free. But one glance into his face was enough to tell me that he was doomed.

For a few seconds I stood, half

dazed, looking down at the pitiful wreck of what, a few minutes before had been a man full of life and the desire to live. Then a sudden thought came to me.

"Where is Vasantasena?" I asked of Ramzan.

"There, O *sahib*," the man answered, pointing with his reddened blade to the faintly moving fragments of the python.

"There?" I repeated, aghast, as the sinister import of his words came home to me. "There? Are you mad, *havildar*?"

Ramzan shrugged grimly.

"At least she is not within the fort, *sahib*," he declared.

"You talk like a child—not a man!" I cried roughly, trying to fight down the ghastly conviction which was taking hold of my mind. "If the girl is not here she must have contrived to lower herself over the wall of the fort, and so escape."

The grim old *shikaree* did not answer at once. Instead, he stoop-

ed slowly and raised from the ground some tattered fragments of snakeskin, such as composed the dress of Vasantasena. Stooping again, he disentangled a string of blood-stained objects—the necklace which she was accustomed to wear—and held it aloft.

"The snake-girl changed back into her natural form even as she held the captain-*sahib* in her arms," he asserted solemnly. "Of a truth, *sahib*, she was indeed—Naga-Kanya, the queen of all the snakes. That is why they attacked the fort. Her subjects came at her command—and at her death they depart! Look, *sahib*!"

The Gurkha pointed over the parapet as he spoke.

Not a living creature remained in the pass below. But as the farther end of the gorge toward the foot-hills and jungles of the plains, a dark, undulating mass was slowly fading out of sight.



# *The Rack*

*by G. G. Ketcham*

A new author makes his debut here with an off-trail tale whose ending the astute reader will see coming. It doesn't matter; the power lies in the atmosphere, not the plot details, and we think you will remember this story.

THE OLD MAN sat before the mirror in the drafty chamber, and combed the blood from his beard.

His hands were scabrous with the dried brown crust; not even pumice and sand could remove it all. He wondered if he should try. After all, it was the badge of his profession; as Executioner and Persuader to the Inquisition, appointed under the Duke de Seville by their most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, he was a person of some importance. It afforded him these

splendid rooms in the Calle Canardo, and an equally splendid largesse with it. Nor was he unaware of the respect and awe in the peoples eyes as he walked through Seville's crowded marketplace on an afternoon. They would step aside, crossing themselves. And when he made his small purchase of wine, cheese and bread, the merchants never haggled or set their prices higher as they did for the lesser nobility.

He examined his face in the fat-tallow flame, and the shadows scurried like small animals, as the

fire in the wide stone and iron hearth bounced the candle patterns off the smoky wall.

All in all, he supposed to himself, it was a satisfactory calling—though lately a bit trying. He was no longer allowed to sit in the Chamber among the princes, Church and Secular, and listen to the hoarse latin intonations from the hooded tribunal, and note the various responses of the prisoners.

Some threw themselves on the Court and begged mercy; others proudly, even arrogantly, refused to answer the Inquisitor. These latter were the greatest challenge to his art and craft: to make them want to confess all their sins committed since childhood, even sins merely read or heard about. That was art.

The old man smiled. No, he wouldn't wash the blood off. He remembered every spot. Here a blackamoor who worshipped a heathen god; here a teutonic reformer who defied His Holiness; these were of Jews; all unconfessed—he didn't remember how many—and these were from stubborn Conversos, the worst of the lot.

A spot—this one he thought—from a boy of ten years of age, the bastard son of the late Duke; he was accused by the present Duke, the nephew.

And then for those who managed to live in spite of his craft,

there were the *autos da fe*, the lovely fires and the burnings.

But *this* spot . . . this blood . . . he couldn't quite remember. A youth of twenty or twenty-one; comely and with a strong spirit; and such eyes—why couldn't he forget those eyes?

Things were never the same anymore. No longer allowed at the Sessions. And now those dreams; always alike. He would awaken in this room, only colder than now, and he would see seven hooded figures around his bed. As they beckoned to him, he would follow at length until they stopped in a vast amphitheater built of ivory. High up, higher than he could focus his failing eyesight, even in a dream, sat a giant figure swatched in crimson robes. The specter would extend an arm (always in the same solemn way each time he dreamed) and in an accent of purest Castilian, speak thunderously what was undoubtedly a question. He could not answer.

The question was repeated again. Again he could not answer, and each time he refused, he felt bands tighten around his chest. A part of his dreaming mind recognized the embrace of the Morano Maiden, though he could see nothing.

Always in these dreams, after the inquisitor had asked the same



nonsense question for the seventh time, the old man would wake up in a sweat.

WELL . . . TONIGHT there was no time for sleep or dreams. He was too busy. Even if he was not privileged to sit in chamber, they still managed to keep him plentifully supplied. This one now though, was a real challenge. Nothing seemed to break this prisoner; in fact, he seemed to smile in an insulting way through all that the torture could devise.

This had upset the old man's afternoon. He had come back to his quarters to read, in hope of inspiration.

He mused through Corbellis' translation of Li Lang's *Hai Tai Ping*, a delicious and subtle account of the craft under the great Master during the reign of Kublai Khan. There was also the Gustavson text of the Arabic, *The Refinement of Pain*. He found this manuscript, for all its delicate calligraphy, too mechanical in approach to match the Yuan techniques of China. There were enough devices in the dungeon now; what he needed was a new approach, a new philosophy. He had tried bells, and the water torture, and all the usual contrivances: lead in the ears, the pulling out of fingernails . . . everything!

And still the recalcitrant devil

refused to confess. Well, what with the little help he was getting these days, what could one expect? There had been a time when he could have made a dramatic entrance into the dungeon after the Inquisitors guards had brought the prisoner from his cell; now he had to collect the miscreants himself and personally drag them to the Room of Truth.

These were indeed bad times — cheap times; but maybe he was just getting old.

He tried to picture the face of his recent problem. Was he young or old? It was a man; that he remembered. But 20 or 21 or older? Sometimes it seemed that the prisoner was a young man, a comely youth with strong spirit and eyes; he remembered the eyes. Then again; he was an old proud man with thin ascetic lips and pale cheekbones. No matter.

He had found the passage in Li Lang's treatise which suited his purpose. The Sweetness of Death; it was called; delightful.

The naked prisoner was covered with a paste made of honey and then hundreds of bees were released into the room. He was kept there chained for days. As the bees sought their goal, the pollen, the victim would move occasionally. Each time he did so, he would most probably receive a sting. In days, this could amount to hundreds of stings. Days of

trying to remain still as the little workers crawled over his body, until at the end the man's mind as well as his body was one ugly swollen welt!

The old man put the massive volume away, tenderly.

As he made his slow path down the high stone steps, complaining at each pain in his stiffening joints; small night creatures watched his progress fearfully.

The dungeons of the Castillo Muerto were accessible to his rooms by a tunnel under the cobblestone street. He lit a torch to guide his way through the damp access and there was a sound of tiny claws against the darkness. As usual, there were no guards at the iron-gated entrance. Perhaps he had better see their majesties about this omission.

WAVING HIS TORCH, he scattered a group of lean and savage rats feasting on one of their kind; then with great effort, he twisted his giant key in the lock to the cells.

There they were! All seven; still chained to the wall, their heads down in silence.

"Well my friends. Are you ready for my ministrations? No? You have nothing to say? No matter. I will have time to talk with all of you later."

The old man moved the torch

closer to one of the chained; it was another old man, after all!

"And you, my stubborn friend. I have something special for you tonight."

Now what was it? Blast his memory! . . . Something about flowers? No, that wasn't it. Why couldn't he remember these things any longer? Perhaps if he got the prisoner on the rack, it would come back.

The old man uncoupled the leg and arm shackles, and grasping one limb, dragged the limp body through the fetid corridor, and down another flight of high stone steps.

The old man's work room was well equipped and he was proud of it. In the center stood the instrument named by the English with typical sense of caste, "duke of Exeter's daughter"—a large rack of the latest design, so beautifully arranged in leverage that even his failing strength could exert excruciating tension. There were also Maidens, a body press, lead and oil cauldrons, and several kinds of hand and foot vises.

He doubted if there were a better Room of Truth in the kingdom. Hiking the prisoner's body on to the rack, the old man tied both arms and legs. Damn this one. "Stop grinning—I'll show you this time if there be humor in my art. This time, you *will* confess. . ."

Slowly he turned the large wheel.

There was a noise in the corridor above.

The door above the stone steps opened, and three armed guards walked slowly down, their faces contorted in horror. They seized the old man. He protested violently as they pulled him up into an empty cell, and closed an iron door on him in a room with no light and no warmth.

LATER, THE Duke de Seville talked with dinner companions over a glass of Frontero brandy.

"The old man is mad—you see. He had been a capable public servant once . . . but no matter. Probably it happened—his madness I mean—after he was forced to torture his only son, a renegade, and later confessed heretic. Unfortunately, the lad died on the rack.


"Mad though he became, we kept him, and even humored him because of . . . ah . . . past services I don't think he yet realizes that the Inquisition has been over ten years, and that Torquemada

has been dead three of these. He thinks he is still doing his job. I understand that he even imagines his face and hands are splattered with the blood of his former victims!

"We never dreamed, though, what he was really doing. Mother of God—if you could have seen it! He had been digging up the corpses of all his last victims and doing it over again. Do you understand what I am saying? Torturing their decayed and putrified flesh as he had once done to it when it lived. Seven of them in all."

"But this last of the—what shall I call them, condemned?—was a person of rank and importance. From an Abbey crypt. How he managed it undetected, I may never know.

"Jesus Protect! I'll never forget that rotting figure on the rack, its skull-like features fixed in a hideous smile, only the signet ring on its bony finger identifying it as the remains of the late Friar Thomas de Torquemada, Inquisitor General of all Spain."



# A Cry From Beyond

by Victor Rousseau

(author of *The Curse of Amen-Ra*)

I HAD SEEN FROM the first that the seance was doomed to failure. Doctor Claude Merrick had inveigled three distinguished physicians into attending, that night in 1930, and we had got into the usual rut. Charlie Wing, Merrick's Chinese boy, and a born medium, had been possessed in turn by the spirits of Queen Victoria, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Julius Caesar, and was now writhing uneasily, preparatory to awaking to his natural state.

And then it came, that brief 'Help me! I don't know where I am! "

"Who are you? " asked Merrick.

"He is painting in his room. I can't get in. I can't wake up. I hate Milburn."

"But who are you? " asked Merrick again.

"*Parlez-vous ? Parlez-vous ?* " came the answer. Then Charlie sneezed and woke, and seance was at an end. Merrick turned on the lights. The three physicians rose, looking bored and annoyed; a little ashamed, too, as if they had placed themselves in a ridiculous position.

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Ackerman.

While, as he relates in his introduction to Alva Rogers' nostalgic volume, *A Requiem for Astounding*, the inauguration of *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE* was a difficult task for Harry Bates, there was no such problem with *STRANGE TALES*. This is partly because the writing of weird fiction did not (as science fiction did in the Gernsback days) consist of trying to make a story around scientific theses and speculations, but rather adding to an already established body of lore, very little of which had to be explained to the reader. In any event, the first issue of *STRANGE TALES* was on a much firmer level than the first issue of *ASTOUNDING*, most of the contents of the latter being neither particularly good science nor good fiction. (One of the exceptions, of course, was Murray Leinster's *Tanks*; another was an out-and-out occult tale—*The Stolen Mind*, by C. V. Tench.) VICTOR ROUSSEAU was an old-time favorite with readers of *WEIRD TALES*, as well as readers of the old Munsey magazines; and while his contributions to *ASTOUNDING* hardly justified the word-of-mouth reputation he enjoyed among science fiction readers, his contributions to *STRANGE TALES* left no doubt about why he was appreciated. I have often thought that had Clayton produced ST to compete visually—trimmed edges, which made a magazine seem less pulpy—with WT, Bates's magazine would have stood up much better against Wright's.

"Very interesting, Doctor Merrick," said Forbes, the brain specialist. "It certainly gives one food for thought."

"A quite extraordinary exhibition," said Burroughs, the head of the State Hospital for the Insane. "Though you'll agree with me, I'm sure, that we shall have to go a considerable way further before we can apply your methods to the average case."

The third physician said very little, and looked frankly annoyed. Merrick ushered them out, a smile upon his lips. Charlie was straightening the seance room preparatory to serving dinner. Out of his trances he knew nothing that had occurred, and was just a good Chinese servant.

"Well, Benson, failure—rank failure," laughed Merrick, when he had got over his annoyance. "I warned those three wiseacres that they might expect just the sort of thing that has happened. Mischievous spirits, pretending to be the shades of the mighty dead; elementals playing pranks

upon humans; astrals, discarded shells of thought, mere automata, attracted to the medium and pouring out the contests of their soulless minds in gibberish.

"I explained it all to them. I tried to tell them of the enormous difficulties. I begged them to realize that it is like the task of the pearl-diver, satisfied with one pearl out of a barrel of waste products. It didn't go. It never goes. These fellows demand an instant, logical explanation of heaven and hell and the hereafter, by James Johnson, late of the Union League Club, together with full proof of identity."

IT WAS DISAPPOINTING. I might almost say, heartrending. If only the investigator would try to understand what he is up against! Imagine a public call-box, with the receiver off the hook, and a mob, all at the same time, trying to transmit messages, while half asleep, to various friends; also imagine a group of urchins interrupting them to shout opprobrious epithets or to play pranks, and you begin to get some notion of the difficulties of posthumous communication. But I had seen enough in my capacity as secretary to Doctor Claude Merrick to be convinced of the reality of inter-communication between the dead and the living.

As a physician of considerable reputation, naturally he did not court publicity. Yet, believing in the truth of this, believing, too, that many cases of insanity are due to what is termed "possession," he felt it his duty to attempt to convince some of his own profession.

Charlie Wing's mediumistic powers had been discovered by accident. The boy had been Merrick's servant for a year before he was discovered entranced in the kitchen one evening, a piece of paper on the table, a pencil in his hand, and on the paper a certain message—but that is by the way. He was setting the table now with a bland smile on his yellow face, as if nothing had occurred that afternoon at all out of the line of his ordinary duties.

"Benson," said Merrick, "did you get that fragment that came through at the end?"

"About Milburn?"

"Yes. That was unusual, getting a name across, when the communicator could not give his own."

"You think that was real?" I asked.

"It sounded as if the communicator made a wild grab at the telephone just as the line was going out of business. Most of our veridical messages have come through in that way."

"But what does Milburn signify ? " I asked.

"It is a fishing village on the coast of Massachusetts. There is an artists' colony there, I believe, although I expect it has now broken up for the winter. You remember our case with the policeman who was painting landscapes under the guidance of the late Weathermore ?"

I remembered that case. Weathermore, cut off in his prime, had inspired a young policeman of artistic powers to continue his work. In the end, Merrick had persuaded the dead man to abandon his attempts at continuing the vicarious practice of his art.

I am inclined to think," said Merrick, "that Weathermore was back of that communication. Somebody is in trouble at Milburn, and Weathermore is helping him while he is asleep. That is why he couldn't wake up, as he phrased it."

"Who can it be ? "

"He gave his name as Parlezvous," said Merrick thoughtfully. "Of course, that is the sort of, prank a low-class spirit or elemental would indulge in. At the same time, the difficulty of getting names across, except pictographically, is enormous."

He paced the room. Charlie had set the soup on the table, but Merrick, deep in thought, seemed not to perceive it, and I knew he would not appreciate having his attention called to the matter.

Suddenly he stepped into the office adjacent and came back with a copy of *Who's Who*. He turned the pages rapidly.

"Here you are, Benson," he said. "Born 1887, educated at Groton studied art in Paris. Exhibited, et cetera. Married, first, Georgiana McLaren, daughter of Ian McLaren, of Boston, 1912; second, Millicent Hayes daughter of James Hayes of London 1926. Daughter Elsie, born 1928."

"Well ? " I asked.

"It was Weathermore who was at the back of this, Benson," said the doctor, closing the heavy volume. "Very clever of him getting that word Milburn across like that, with Mary, Queen of Scots and Julius Caesar cluttering up the wires. But I'm not so sure the message has reference to him, after all. It said that 'he' was painting in the room."

"If it was Weathermore, he wouldn't have gone to all that trouble to communicate unless this person is in desperate need of help," continued the doctor.

"But, Doctor Merrick," I said, "you haven't told me who this person is, or how you got his name," I protested.

He stared at me. "Eh ? What's that ? I thought I'd told you," he

answered. "Why, our friend, Parlez-vous, is French—Alfred French, one of the most representative of modern American painters. Rather ingenious of our friend Weathermore, wasn't it? But I'm inclined to think it was his wife who sent out that appeal for help while resting this afternoon.

"Come along, Benson, the soup's getting cold."

I THINK IT WAS the doctor's realization that Weathermore would not have asked his aid in any ordinary case that decided him to go down to Milburn. Fortunately it was not difficult to obtain a note of introduction to French, and, after registering at the local hotel, we strolled along the shore road to French's bungalow.

There were some half-dozen houses and bungalows standing along the shore, but all except French's had been closed for the winter. His was the last of all, a long, old-fashioned, single-story cottage standing on the very edge of the low cliff, with the Atlantic breakers roaring underneath and tossing foam almost to the doorstep.

It was a desolate place, even in summer, and much more so now, with the few straggling birches almost denuded to their withered leaves, and that expanse of sea and sky, and the roar of the ocean perpetually in one's ears. There was an eerie feeling about the cottage, too, which did not decrease as we stepped up and Merrick rapped with the ancient brass knocker upon the dented plate.

It was French himself who opened the door—I remembered having seen his portrait somewhere. His hair was disordered, his face anxious.

"My name is Merrick—Doctor Merrick," my companion began.

"Thank God you've come, Doctor," answered French. "My wife has been asleep since two o'clock this afternoon, and I can't wake her up!"

Without further explanations, Merrick entered the cottage, and I followed at his heels. French led the way into a large bedroom, tastefully furnished in Colonial style. Beyond it I could see his studio, with paintings on easels. On the bed lay a young woman, apparently fast asleep. Her face was flushed, her eyes closed, her breathing stertorous. In a crib beside her, a child of three was sitting up, playing assiduously with a doll. She raised her eyes solemnly to ours, and then returned to her doll without a word. Her face was strangely white.

MERRICK STEPPED TO THE bedside and raised the woman's arm. It remained extended stiffly in the air. He made two or three passes over her face and snapped his fingers.



"Wake up!" he commanded her.

Instantly the arm dropped. The woman opened her eyes, looked at us in surprise, and sat up.

"Why, Alfred, what's the matter?" she inquired, in astonishment.

French, overcome with gratitude, and a little awed, had readily agreed to Merrick's request that he should let his wife believe we had been called in to treat her. He promised to make full explanations later, and Mrs. French's state of health certainly called for attention.

"I never feel well here," she told us. "All last summer I was upset, but this summer I've been worse than ever before. But Alfred loves this place, and so I agreed to remain until the middle of November. You see," she added, "he used to come here with his first wife, Georgiana, year after year. She died here suddenly, seven years ago. She's buried in the old cemetery on the hilltop.

"You may say I'm foolish to accede to his wishes," she went on, "but, you see, Alfred's art means everything to him, and then we are very happy together. And Elsie needs the sea air. You may have noticed . . ."

Merrick nodded. "Anemic, decidedly," he said. "But how about yourself, Mrs. French? What is the chief trouble?"

"I think it began with worrying about Elsie," she answered. "She was so healthy when we came here in June, and almost immediately she began to be sick. We've had several doctors here, including Messenger, who came all the way from Boston, but they can't find out what's the cause of the trouble, and all they advise is to let her have the benefit of the sea air."

"But your own symptoms, Mrs. French?" asked the doctor again.

"I can't sleep from worrying," she answered. "And when I do sleep, I sleep for hours, and Alfred can't wake me. And I have the most dreadful dreams."

"Ah, and can you describe these dreams to me? I mean, any dream that seems to recur pretty constantly?"

"I can't remember a thing, but they're terrible beyond imagination. I know that I try to wake, and I can't wake. And then I'm afraid to go to sleep again, and all of a sudden my eyes close, and . . ."

She began sobbing hysterically, and Merrick questioned her no farther.

PUTTING LITTLE ELSIE to bed was a rite, as in so many American families where everything centers about the child. First, French had to ride her on his back up and down the studio, and pretend to be

respectively a slow old horse, a spirited charger, and an elephant. Then Millicent French had to tell her stories, with dramatic impersonations, being successively, father bear, mother bear, and baby bear.

And then came the rite of the doll. For George had to be disrobed, with pretense of bathing, and robed in his nightgown, and rocked to sleep, and finally laid upon the pillow beside his little mistress. Only then did Elsie consent to having the light put out, and even then there had to be two farewell kisses.

"Has your little girl always insisted that that is a male doll?" asked Merrick of French, when the parents had finally disposed of their offspring.

"No, she thinks it's a girl doll," he answered, "but she insists that the name is George."

"How long has she done that?"

"Since we came here this summer. As a matter of fact, my first wife's name was Georgiana," he added. "It's possible that the child has heard the name mentioned, although naturally my wife and I seldom refer to her. I hope you two gentlemen will have supper with us," he added. "We can't offer you very much in the way of a meal, but if you can stand . . ."

"We'll be delighted," answered Merrick promptly.

"We sat down to cold ham and tongue, a salad, and some dessert that did credit to Mrs. French's cooking. After the dishes had been cleared away, Millicent French withdrew, apologizing for leaving us.

"I really believe I'm going to have a good, sound sleep tonight," she said. "You've done me good in some way, Doctor Merrick."

She looked very charming as she smiled and bade us good night.

I HAD ANTICIPATED THAT explanations would be somewhat difficult, but to my surprise this did not prove to be the case. French had known Weathermore, and he was not unfavorably disposed toward the consideration of psychic matters. The doctor told him frankly of the communication.

"It's all very extraordinary," said French, leaning forward in his chair in the big studio. "As a matter of fact, I've—I've been afraid the influences here were not exactly good for either my wife or daughter. The truth is—well, my first wife and I were very happy here."

He sighed. "You see, Elsie and she were friends," he said. "I felt that in a way it brought us all closer together. You see, as I told you, I am a believer in . . ."

"I am going to speak frankly to you, French," Merrick interrupted him. "You have made a monumental error, and you are likely to pay dearly for it. You believed that the dead are in intimate association with the living, thinking the same thoughts, actuated by the same feelings as when they were alive."

"Isn't that so?" cried French, starting up in his chair. "Do you mean to tell me . . . ?"

"I mean to tell you," answered Merrick, "that the boundary which was set between the dead and the living, if crossed at all, it must be under expert guidance."

There was a solemnity about his tones that impressed us both with a sense of awe, almost of terror.

"The dead," said Merrick, "however intensely they long to revisit those whom they loved, can re-enter this sensory life as we enter the astral world—in sleep; that is to say, in dreams. To them, everything is distorted, changed; and on their plane matter is so plastic that their wishes insensibly create new situations which they mistake for reality."

"I have known a father, who loved his child beyond anything on Earth, and sought to revisit it. He did so as a haunting poltergeist, flinging crockery around, knocking down pictures from the walls, terrorizing the child he loved with hideous manifestations, and all this without the slightest idea that he was causing trouble or making his presence manifest at all."

"Then," said French in a shaky voice, "you mean that Georgiana . . . ?"

Merrick did not answer him for a while. Presently he spoke again.

"It is fortunate that Weathermore sent me here," he said. "I must tell you frankly, French, that the trouble has, in my opinion, already progressed so far, that, even if you were to leave Milburn immediately; if you were to burn down this house and plough up the ground on which it stands, it is unlikely it could be cured."

"Do you mean—good God, do you mean that Georgiana is the cause of—of my wife's and daughter's illness?" asked French.

"But, my dear sir, you summoned her, did you not, even though the call was partly an unconscious one? Did you not come here with the idea of entering into a sort of communion with her? That desire reached far into the next world, French."

French said in shaky tones, "She always wanted a child. It was the unhappiest thing in her life."

Merrick nodded gravely. "I see that your own diagnosis is pretty

correct," he replied. "You probably realized that your wife was in a cataleptic state this afternoon? You know what that portends?"

"That she was in an abnormal condition. That she—she . . ."

"That she had been thrown into a mediumistic condition, not necessarily by your first wife, but by the elemental influences that are always waiting to rush in and obtain sustenance at the expense of human beings, just as humanity preys upon the beasts, and the beasts upon the vegetable kingdom."

Again there was silence. "What am I to do?" asked French.

"With your permission, I am going to keep watch in the bedroom tonight," answered Merrick. "Perhaps you will permit Mr. Benson to stay there with me. At what hour does your wife fall asleep?"

"Now it is curious you should have asked me that," French answered. "Invariably at twenty minutes before one. It—it is the hour at which Georgiana died," he added in a shaken whisper.

IT WAS EXACTLY twenty minutes before one when French came back into the studio and informed us that his wife was asleep. We went in softly. Millicent French was fast asleep, but her breathing was natural, her skin moist and of a natural color. In the crib beside her the child slept, clutching the big doll in her arms. There was nothing eerie about the room. Outside, beneath the cliff, the sea splashed softly. There was a half-moon in the sky, casting a flood of silver through the windows.

Merrick drew up two chairs beside little Elsie's crib and sat watching her. I wondered why it was the child he watched instead of the mother. I sat down beside him, while French flung himself into a big armchair at the side of his wife's bed and sat there, his head in his hands.

The pose Merrick assumed, his air of quiet watchfulness reminded me of Luke Fildes' celebrated painting of "The Doctor". Strength seemed to radiate from him. I knew that what human being could do, Merrick would do. A small clock on the dressing-table ticked away the minutes.

It seemed close in the room, despite the season and the fact that the window was partly open. Time and again I felt my eyes closing; then I would open them with a sudden start, always to see Merrick seated there, watching. I could see the hands of the clock in the flood of moonlight. It was two o'clock now. Nothing had happened.

Then slowly a feeling of intense depression began to overcome me. I seemed to feel another presence in the room. It was nothing evil, but something bewildered, baffled, groping through darkness. The feeling of closeness was becoming accentuated.

The next thing I knew, I was lying on a lounge in the studio, and a flood of sunlight was streaming in through the window. There was a smell of coffee. Merrick came briskly out of the kitchen, carrying a tray with plates and cups.

"Awake, Benson?" he asked. "Don't worry; I slept, too. It was too strong for us. But you pretty nearly got into the cataleptic state. We're starting back after breakfast to get Charlie. He's about the last hope for the Frenches."

I WAS SHOCKED TO SEE the change in Millicent French and Elsie when we returned with Charlie Wing on the following day. Mrs. French was almost in a condition of collapse, while the child had lost all the energy she had shown on that evening of our arrival. She lay in her crib, looking like a little waxen image, and clutching the doll tightly in her arms. There was the weazened look of an old man upon her features.

French had told his wife that Charlie had come to help her till she grew stronger, and she had not the energy to ask any questions, but seemed to accept our presence as natural.

"Tell me, Doctor Merrick, is there any hope?" he asked late that afternoon, while we three sat together in the studio, and Charlie scoured the dishes in the kitchen, whistling a cheerful tune the while. "That Chinese boy of yours — is it possible he can be of any assistance?"

"Charlie is one of the best mediums I have known," responded the doctor. "I can say no more than that. Tonight, my friend, we shall either free your wife and daughter from this influence forever, or . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If we win through, French," he said, "remember for the rest of your life that the paths of the living and those we call dead lie in different directions, and never seek communication save under expert guidance."

He turned to me. "Benson, I think I'd like to take a little stroll to clear my brain," he said. "Will you come with me?"

WE LEFT THE HOUSE and struck inland across a field, following a narrow road with the dead stalks of goldenrod waist-high on either side of us. Crows flapped and cawed on dead stumps, or wheeled noisily into the air. A little distance back of the house was the old burying-ground. It contained some twenty-five or thirty graves, the headstones, which had all either tilted or fallen, dating back to a century

before in some cases. It was not difficult to locate that of French's first wife, if only for the comparative newness of the stone. A wreath of immortelles lay on the mound.

Merrick stopped and read the inscription. "'Let her rest in peace,'" he commented, translating the three Latin words. "Easier said than done, French. Your idea of letting her rest in peace, poor soul, is to set off an alarm clock in her ears!"

He turned to me. "Benson, there's a spade under the back seat of the car," he said. "Please bring it here at once. And don't let French see you."

We had parked the car just around the curve of the shore road, and it was not difficult to get the spade and strike a course back behind the untenanted cottages without French seeing me. But Merrick's sudden order had filled me with apprehensions of terror. It was only too easy to guess the purpose in his mind. My every instinct revolted, and with that rebellion came doubts of the whole business.

Suppose Merrick was self-deluded, Charlie Wing an impostor, the whole French affair cleverly staged by the Chinese, and Millicent French and the child simply the victims of some obscure disease? To violate the sanctity of the grave, and unknown to French himself, seemed to me intolerable.

But when I saw Merrick waiting quietly beside the mound, the strength that always radiated from him calmed my doubts. As if understanding my state of mind, he said; "There's no need for you to wait, Benson if it disturbs you. Suppose you stroll back slowly, and I'll rejoin you presently."

"No, I'll see this thing through," I answered. "But are you sure . . . ?"

He clapped his hand on my shoulder. "I'm as sure as I've ever been sure of anything," he replied.

With that he set to work. With a strength of which I had believed him incapable, he began digging into the mound and tossing the clods aside. It was worse than eery, it was horrible, to see him progressing in the failing light, with those birds of ill omen sitting on the stumps and rails of the decaying fence, and watching him.

Soon Merrick was below the ground, only his head and shoulders showing, and these disappeared from my view as he dug deeper; flinging up great shovelfuls of earth beside the trench. He was still working with undiminished energy. I stepped to the side of the grave and volunteered to take my turn at the work, but he only shook his head and went on.

Nevertheless he was fully a half hour at work before I saw a corner

of the coffin come into view, and it was ten minutes more before the casket lay completely exposed to view. Then Merrick inserted the blade beneath a corner of the rotten wood, and began to lever at the lid. That was when I stepped back so as not to see.

But I could hear, and I shuddered as I heard the sudden rending, splintering sound which indicated that the lid had given. Involuntarily I closed my eyes.

"Come here, Benson," called Merrick.

Mastering my horror with a supreme effort, I stepped once more to the side of the grave. I opened my eyes and looked down. But all that I could make out inside the coffin was a heap of white bones and a few little mounds of dust.

Merrick leaped up and caught me as I reeled. For a moment everything went black. Then I recovered myself and stood unassisted.

"It's — it's all right," I muttered. "I thought . . ."

"Why, what's the matter, Benson?" asked the doctor in evident astonishment. "What was it that you expected to see?"

But suddenly he understood what had been passing through my mind. "Did you expect to see flesh and blood inside the coffin, man?" he asked. "No, no, Benson, I assure you you're on the wrong trail altogether."

Yes, it was true—I had expected to see something far more terrible than a mere heap of moldering bones. And I was mystified beyond measure as the doctor laid down the spade and motioned to me to accompany him back to the house.

IT WAS NO USE asking Merrick questions or demanding explanations before he was ready to volunteer statements. So much I had learned at a very early date in our association. When he was ready, he would explain, and until then I must just be content to puzzle out my own solutions in my mind.

But what had been the purpose of opening the grave and leaving it open? Had Merrick really expected to find nothing but bones in the coffin? Again my doubts returned. I was in a state of considerable agitation by the time we got back to the bungalow.

Charlie Wing was hard at work with the dinner in the kitchen, and whistling discordantly in his usual cheerful manner.

It was a sorry meal that we three sat down to. The child had fallen asleep, and Millicent French had refused to leave her; Charlie had brought her a light meal, but she had only drunk a little tea. French declined to

eat anything. I saw his haggard eyes watching every movement that the doctor made. There appeared to be resentment in them now. He was in the state of mind when an explosion is imminent.

"I've had enough of this fooling!" he shouted suddenly, starting to his feet. "Leave this house, the three of you! What do I know about you? You two came here with a lot of poppycock, and then you brought in this Chink! How do I know what your schemes are? Leave this house, I tell you, or, by God, I'll kill you!"

His voice rose into a shriek. He leaped across the room, snatched a revolver from a drawer, and pointed it at Merrick's head. "Now will you go?" he shouted, his face working with maniacal anger.

The doctor looked at French without any change of expression. He moved his hands almost imperceptibly in front of the enraged man's face, snapped his fingers, reached out and took the weapon and slipped it into his pocket. French stared at him with a bewildered look.

"I feel—queer," he said, clapping his hand to his head.

"Go and lie down, my dear fellow," replied Merrick. "You'll be feeling better presently." And, as French stumbled away, the doctor turned to me with an expression of satisfaction.

"Well, that's the best thing that's happened yet," he said. "You don't understand, Benson? You realized that French was temporarily obsessed, that he didn't remember when I awakened him?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"It means that certain entities across the river, whom I might call evil companions of that unfortunate woman, are getting alarmed. That was their little challenge to us. But when you face the elementals boldly, they slink away."

IT WAS A LITTLE after twelve when we adjourned to the bedroom for the seance. French had been quite himself ever since his outburst, of which it was evident he retained no recollection. The doctor had given Mrs. French a pretty strong hypodermic of morphine, and she was fast asleep. In the crib beside her lay Elsie, clasping the doll in her arms.

Our preparations were simple. A clothes closet in the corner of the room served as the dark cabinet, and Charlie was ensconced there in a chair, a broad grin on his yellow face. I am positive he had not the least idea what happened when he was entranced, but just what he thought he was doing I had never been able to make out. Three chairs were set out in front of the cabinet, but in such a way as to bring the child's bed—the



foot of it—into the semi-circle. Then the lights were extinguished, and presently Charlie began to moan and breathe heavily.

It was a scene to which I was well accustomed. In a little while the communications from Julius Caesar and the rest of them would begin. Some mediums have their guides who assume control and chase away these mischievous entities, but for some reason or other Charlie had always been an open telephone line, and we had had to rely entirely upon our judgment as to the validity of what came through.

But each medium has his peculiarities, and, on the other hand, Charlie Wing was that rare being, a materializing one. I had seen too much to doubt this. I had seen the ectoplasmic swirls take the forms of heads and limbs, and we had a nice little collection of photographs which, as Merrick had often said, were too obviously genuine to carry the slightest weight with persons whose judgments were preconceived.

On this occasion I waited with more anxiety than ever before; with a feeling of anxiety that approached terror. I had seen by the look on Merrick's face before the lights went off that he was in a state of extreme tension.

And as I sat there I was wondering about the open grave, and what he had expected to find in it.

The manifestations came suddenly. From Charlie's lips issued a confused muttering, as of a number of persons all trying to talk at once, struggling, jostling each other. If that was fake, it was the work of a master. Then a deep voice, a man's voice, "Get away from here, all of you!" And then, more startling in its dramatic quality, "Merrick! Merrick! Where are you! The light is blinding me! I can't—hold on—for long."

"I'm here!" said Merrick.

"I'm—I'm . . ." Again the eternal difficulty of getting a name through. "The fog—the rain—sunshine—barometer . . ."

"Yes, I know you, Weathermore!"

"Yes, Weathermore. I—I'm bewildered—coming back. So difficult! I've tried to tell her, but she doesn't understand. They're fooling her, that crowd of devils round her, and she's good. She's good, but she doesn't understand, I want to help him—confrere—painter—gay Paree . . ."

"Yes, yes! Go on!"

"They're stronger than me. I—can't hold on . . ."

The voice ended abruptly in a high-pitched cry like a woman's. Then followed utter silence, save for the heavy, stertorous breathing that came from the lips of Millicent French, and from her husband's. Both were

asleep, but this time I had no inclination to sleep. I sat crouched up in my chair, oppressed by the most awful fear that I have ever felt. It was as if all the devils in hell were about to launch themselves into the room.

Faintly, very faintly in the little light that filtered through the window, I could see Charlie twisting and squirming in his chair. Now and again a moan broke from his lips, but no voice came from it.

I knew what that silence meant. It was the prelude to a materialization. With Charlie—I don't know how it is with other mediums—voices and materializations never came simultaneously. It was as if he needed all his powers for the one thing or the other.

Stronger and stronger came that sense of evil. It seemed to me now as if the doctor and I bore the whole burden of the fight upon our shoulders.

IT WAS BEGINNING to grow luminous within the closet. Slowly Charlie's face was beginning to stand out against the background of darkness. It was covered with a filmy cloud, slightly self-luminous, a cloud that was almost imperceptibly detaching itself and gathering itself together.

Little ripples seemed to be running through it in all directions, as if it was a mass of unstable jelly, so fast that it was impossible to say which way the cloud was moving. It circled about the face of the entranced man, now right, now left of him, forming into little swirls that momentarily seemed to take the form of a face, of an arm thrust out through a mass of draperies, and then resolved itself again into an undifferentiated mass. And then I heard a sound behind me—the creaking of bed springs.

I glanced back. Millicent French was rising from the bed. But she was rising as one might picture the dead rising upon the Day of Judgment. And that sight still haunts my memory as the most dreadful of all the things I saw that night.

Jerking, foot by foot, she rose, till she was seated on the edge of the bed. Then, with the same jerky succession of movements, she was crouching upon the floor beside it. She was rising, her knees had straightened, and she now stood upright. And now she was moving toward the cabinet, with arms extended stiffly in front of her; and, dark though it was, I could see that every muscle of her body was set in the rigor of complete catalepsy.

Forward, slowly, hesitantly, as a soul awaiting judgment might move toward the dread seat, moved Millicent. She was coming straight toward us, and I looked at the doctor, not knowing whether he meant to break the circle and let her pass through. But instead of passing me, she moved



(illustration by Amos Sewell)

toward the foot of the child's bed and stood there, arms still outstretched, but as if in protection.

And then I saw the ectoplasm within the cupboard take shape with astounding rapidity. One instant it was a whirling cloud—the next, it had taken the form of a young woman!

A wraith, a phantom built up for the time by the personality behind it. Only a phantom, for it was indistinct at the edges, and I could see that the trailing draperies concealed gaps that had not been covered—at the back of the head, the back of the the body. It was barely more than two-dimensional, a flattened silhouette, and yet curiously, horribly real.

I never read or saw of any more stupendous drama than the one enacted in pantomime before me, as the dead woman and the living one confronted each other. And to my mind the chief horror of it was this, that the two, the living and dead, were merely masks.

Of the dead woman, this was certainly the case. But of the living, it was also true, for what was Millicent French but a shell, a mask, almost as devitalized as the thing that faced her? In stark horror I watched the two draw near, until the outstretched arms of the living woman almost touched the dead one inside the circle.

NOT A SOUND CAME from either, but I could see a look of fear growing in Millicent's eyes. And her arms, which had been extended in front of her, were being bent back until they were stretched out horizontally in front of the crib. I saw an expression begin to dawn upon the face of the ghoul, a look of triumph, of ecstasy . . .

Then suddenly she was gone! There was only the living woman standing at the foot of the crib. But her arms were jerking downward, and then, in the same rigid catalepsy, she stood, a marble statue, to all appearance, inanimate.

There was now no objective phenomenon within the room. The cloud of ectoplasm that had been about Charlie's head had vanished. For a moment I thought that the seance was over, that Merrick had banished the phantom and robbed it of its power.

Then I saw Merrick glance back toward the crib, and I saw something that almost drove the last remnant of sanity from my brain.

For the doll that the child had clasped all night in her arms had grown somehow swollen—monstrously distended. The face had grown larger, the lips redder, and the eyelids seemed to tremble, while the eyes beneath them seemed to reflect an evil light.

Then, even as I looked, a tremor ran through the doll's body. It stirred, it turned, and those red lips were implanted full upon little Elsie's!

Merrick's hand fell upon my wrist with a grip of steel. "Keep your head, Benson," he whispered. "We've won! We've won! God, I scarcely dared hope that she would take the lure! Keep by me!"

As he spoke I was conscious that the evil which had oppressed me had vanished, and it was like the lifting of a heavy cloud. I could see Charlie slumped forward in his seat. Millicent French had collapsed across the bed; her husband was still breathing heavily in his chair. Quietly I stepped toward the crib and looked down at the hellish thing that lay clasped in Elsie's arms.

It was alive! It was flesh and blood, and yet through the flesh I seemed to see the framework of the doll. But it was alive, for there was a flush of blood in the cheeks, and the horrible red lips were growing redder.

And as I looked I seemed to see the child grow even more waxen, as if its life-blood was being drained into the doll's body.

"Keep your head, Benson," whispered Merrick to me again, and stepped to the side of the crib. He stooped and placed his hands about the monstrous thing at Elsie's side.

It was smiling evilly, and, when Merrick tried to pick it up, it still clung to the child with its stumpy hands, and the red lips were withdrawn with an audible suction. It lay in Merrick's arms, squirming and still smiling.

"Come!" he whispered to me; and, carrying the horrible burden, he made his way out of the house. I strode after him over the field. I knew where he was going now, and I could hear the thing making plaintive little mewling noises, which grew fainter, until, by the time we reached the graveyard it had grown silent.

THE MOON HAD nearly set, but by the light of it I could still see the thing, faintly squirming. The eyelids opened, and it looked up piteously into Merrick's face. Merrick poised himself upon the edge of the open grave and hurled it down into the coffin. I heard the yielding thud, as of flesh, as it struck the bottom.

Night after night, Diane dreamed that her dead lover, who had willed her his house in Bayonne, was calling her to arise and open a door—a door which would not open. And every morning she awoke to find her slippers and gown torn, and her fingernails broken and covered with verdigris. Thus was Pierre d'Artols introduced to the bizarre mystery of

## THE BRIDE OF THE PEACOCK

by E. Hoffmann Price

*You'll Find This Compelling Novelet Complete In The Winter*

**STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES**

"The spade, Benson, the spade!" he called, as he jumped down after it and began frantically adjusting the lid of the coffin.

I leaped down after him, spade in hand. A plaintive mewling was coming from within the coffin. There were feeble blows against the lid. The most dreadful thing of all was the appearance of a stumpy hand, that seemed half flesh, half wax, between coffin and lid. Merrick thrust it back with the edge of the spade, and began dragging down the earth from the sides. And all the while that piteous mewling went on, till the increasing weight of the earth smothered it.

But I can tell no more. I only know that I crouched beside the grave, watching Merrick at work, watching him stamping down the shovelled-in earth, and gradually growing taller, until at length he emerged, and only a low mound, as before, marked the site of his work.

He had carefully cut away the sods, and these he now replaced and stamped down in turn. As far as I was able to judge in the faint moonlight, no evidences remained that the grave had been tampered with.

Then only did Merrick drop on the grass beside me and wipe away the sweat that streamed from his forehead. For a while he was too exhausted to talk.

"Well, we've won," he said at length. "It's all over."

I said nothing, and he went on, "You understood, didn't you, Benson? She—the dead woman—had wanted a child. So little Elsie's doll became the focus of all the devil's work that was taking place. It was the doll that was draining the child's life-blood nightly, although it was only when Charile Wing came on the scene that the spirit was able to materialize into a definite shape.

"You must not think that that poor woman was aware of what she was doing. But there are always elementals ready to lend their aid to anything and everything that affords them their supreme desire of coming into touch with mortals.

"I saw that it was touch and go. The only hope lay in materializing this astral shell of the dead woman—a thing entirely automatic and devoid of knowledge or responsibility. I hoped that it would gravitate automatically to the doll instead of returning to the astral sphere, ready to plague the Frenches again. That hope was gratified, and now, six feet beneath the earth, it will slowly molder until its final dissolution sets the dead woman free from the earthbound condition into which her love and desires plunged her."

"DOCTOR, I'M FEELING so much better today, and Elsie seems better too, though she's so weak. I've got a feeling that the worst is over, and that we're both going to get better from now on."

"I can assure you of it, Mrs. French," answered the doctor. "I am so certain of it, that Benson and I are starting back to town this morning. If you should need us again, we are at your disposal, but I'm quite sure everything will be fine from now on."

"That must have been wonderful medicine you gave us," said Millicent vaguely. "But do you know, Elsie's hidden her doll away and won't tell me where she's put it. Where's dolly, darling?" she asked as the child toddled into the room toward her mother.

"Baby buried old dolly, nasty old dolly," answered little Elsie. "Baby buried horrid old dolly last night, in the ground."

"Now, did you ever hear such fancies?" asked Millicent. "Last night she wouldn't go to sleep without her doll, and now she hates it."

"I've got that feeling, too," said French, as we stood at the door. "You hypnotized us all last night, didn't you, Doctor? I know I slept like a top, and I'm feeling like a different man. But I'm still afraid for Millicent and the child."

"Nothing more to be afraid of, if you remember my warning, French," replied the doctor. "One life at a time, now and henceforward."

"All leady, Mastah!" came Charlie's cheerful voice from the car.

So, with a final wave of the hand, Merrick stepped out into the bright sunlight, and I followed him.



# Only Gone Before

by Emil Petaja

(author of *Dark Hollow*)

Those of you who responded to EMIL PETAJA's letter concerning the Bokanalia Foundation, which we ran in our last issue, will be pleased to hear that the returns have been encouraging. A correspondent of H. P. Lovecraft; the first publisher of artwork by Hannes Bok; author of many detective and western stories as well as both prose and poetry in the weird line, Petaja now has a series of novels dealing with Finnish mythology appearing from Ace Books. The present tale, if memory doesn't fail me, is one which *WEIRD TALES* would have run had the magazine lasted longer—we regret the loss and enjoy the gain.

"TIMES AIN'T WHAT they used." Cyril's dinner companion sucked at a hollow tooth as he spanked the bottom of his ketchup bottle until his steak resembled an open wound. "Not in Shaeffer since the mines petered out."

Cyril Osbourne turned from their table in the hotel's dingy dining room toward Main Street. It looked even dustier and bleaker than he remembered; almost it cringed. Half the shops were boarded up, half the houses tottered in disuse. Shaeffer's plight was illustrated in the huge



corroded smokestacks and peeled sheds that loomed in silhouette against the rising skyline. Those lead mines had given Shaeffer its *raison d'être* for existing, hidden in the eastern rambles of half-bare hills of California, for many years. Then, suddenly, it was all over; they lingered like forgotten idols against the bleeding sunset.

Why had Cyril come back?

"Guess them what sold out and left Shaeffer twenty years ago was right." The gnarled man stared into vacancy, ruminating his tough steak.

He puckered his red-thatched brows at Cyril. "Say, you look kind of familiar. Been here in Shaeffer long? Traveling salesman, maybe?"

"No."

"Government agent?"

"No."

The eater showed Cyril his masticated veal when he grinned widely. "I got it! You're a writer! You come here to write a book about Shaeffer. Now don't you go calling this a ghost town, like some feller did in the Sunday paper once. There's a few of us left here, and we aim to stick!"

Cyril smiled politely. "You needn't worry about that. I am not a writer."

The red head bobbed downward. Cyril caught the scowl of irritation; it intimated that Cyril had sidestepped his obligation to Shaefferian society by refusing to play conversational handball. He smiled inwardly. Then he frowned. There *was* something vaguely familiar about this man. That flaming hair, and those preposterous ears.

A mood of remembrance smote him.

CYRIL HAD NEVER liked Shaeffer. Even as a boy he had loathed these people. A mining inheritance had brought him and his widowed mother out west from New Hampshire. While he grew to love the surrounding hills and the fascinating things they taught him, he never grew to love the people. Each afternoon when school let out it had been his passion to seek the solitudes of the rolling hills, bored by the childish games of Tommy and Fishhead and Beanpole, concerning himself rather with the small scraps of human life he found there. Little animals, mysterious little creatures—they were everywhere. You wouldn't think you would find them sliming across a bare rock but you did. Insects. Lichen. All manner of fascinating creatures.

All of this was cupped within the thin sensitive boy's avid mind, curiosity that expanded eventually into his life's work in biological research. Perhaps it was the early dreams that brought him back here after thirty

years? Yet, in the face of important field trips to the four corners of the planet, what had Shaeffer to offer him, now?

His mother died before he went to college; he had no relatives, certainly no friends here in Shaeffer. So then—what voice had called him back to this unloved village after so many busy years?

"Beanpole," he murmured.

"Huh?" The man across from him started.

"I was thinking about somebody I used to know a long time ago. In school."

"They used to call me Beanpole in school." A grimace suggested that his resentment hadn't ever worn off. "Are you sure you didn't never live her in Shaeffer, mister? Our teacher was Mrs. Kulligan. She taught all the lower grades. Are you sure you don't remember?"

In a rush like a wind from the past Cyril *did* remember. He remembered Mrs. Kulligan, and her goiter; he remembered the pine benches, the droning flies, the inevitable picture of George Washington near the pot-belly stove. Everything.

Fork poised, the man across eyed him suspiciously.

"No," Cyril said calmly, as he stood up to leave. "I have never been here before in my life. I was born and brought up in—Patagonia."

• IT WAS A RELIEF to leave Beanpole and that dismal little hotel dining room. He walked down the board sidewalk, watching the street rubbish fumble and foregather in untidy heaps under the impetus of a low evening wind that grieved softly through the grey misshapen buildings. That was disturbing, but it was better than Beanpole.

He mused: If only I could look down into the deepest wells of my subconscious mind and trace out the exact memory pattern that brought me back to Shaeffer. What possible reason could there be to waste two week's vacation on this outpost? What compulsion forced me to board the train, then bus, which brought me here? If only I could know *why*—then perhaps I could leave at once, salvage what is left of my hard-earned holiday.

A brown cur flung itself out from a yard through a sagging gate. It yapped at his heels. Both gate and dog were vaguely familiar. Well, it might be the same gate. But it couldn't be the same dog, although possibly one of his descendants.

He hastened on through the gloom.

The schoolhouse looked different. Larger. The perspective from boyhood to manhood is usually the reverse. But this schoolhouse was larger,

a new one, although not very new any longer. He walked quickly on, resenting his twinge of sentiment. In a few moments he found himself on a narrow hill path outside of town, pelting as if in a hurry to get some particular place in a hurry.

When he reached the hill's brow he knew he was.

It was still quite a long way off, down in the hollow. Down a winding weed-grown road which, a hundred years ago, black-draped carriages had lumbered with their dead occupants, down to that row of funeral cypresses and that big wrought-iron gate which bore across it the ominous legend:

### "ONLY GONE BEFORE"

It was still there. Just the same. Everything was just as it had been thirty years ago, when Cyril used to scramble down the old carriage road to the century-old Welsh graveyard. Not a grave in these hallowed grounds postdated the San Francisco fire, and most of the Morgans and McQuilsets whose family dead had been reverently laid away here had long since quitted the area.

There was a reason behind this. The mines again. Once before they had petered out. It was more than a decade later that more ambitious drills in the hands of greedier drillers located a new vein. Thus, the Shaefferians Cyril had hated were johnnies-come-lately, not the elder Welsh folk of Only Gone Before. It was like a minor civilization that ebbs and flows, rises and falls.

FOR REASONS UNKNOWN Only Gone Before was never used by the newcomers; they shunned its rusty arch, its cypresses, its mouldering headstones. The graveyard lay untrammelled in its hollow, with only the keening of night hawks and the furtive sounds that little creatures make to interrupt the pastorate silence.

It was the little creatures who brought Cyril to the graveyard in the first place. They flourished in this shunned area. Local legends of ghillies and ghosties and long-legged beasties and things going boomp in the night kept the village children away — all except Cyril. Even Cyril never stayed there after dark. The ponderous booming of the mine whistle from over the hill, as the night shift went on duty at seven, always warned him that his mother would be rewarming his dinner and waiting anxiously.

As he threaded his way through the cattle maze erected at the foot

entrance so long ago, Cyril was a boy again, remembering these things.

The rain and wind, and ravenous Time, had sunk the graves a little farther in, and had munched at the poesy enscribed on the headstones. But essentially all was as it had been thirty years back.

Cyril stopped at a familiar stone.

*Our dear Pauline from us has gone,  
She is happy in the fair beyond.  
She has traveled from Life's weary road,  
To her Father's heavenly abode.*

The poet in his nature rebelled as he reread several of these melancholy lyrics. They didn't scan, or sometimes even rhyme. But they had an electric effect on Cyril's nerves. As a boy he had spelled them out, and now they were engraven on his subconscious mind. They were *part* of something important and vaguely terrifying. Like the soft moaning of the wind as it set the dark pillar trees swaying, as it drove the portentous storm clouds across the sky.

What was it? *What?*

He stood very still, concentrating. It was as if by holding his breath and allowing himself to absorb all these stimuli he could actually *be* that boy again, and recall.

No. It was gone. This graveyard was partially why he had come back, but it was only the vessel, the container for the thing contained. He must explore it and himself if he was to discover the total truth.

NIGHT DEEPENED. The storm clouds gathered in; the wind made the cypresses creak their indignation; but Cyril kept on prowling the graves like a restless ghoul. He had to know. The answer was here, somewhere, and he would not leave until he had found it.

At last. . .

It was a gravestone, no newer than the rest, but there was something wrong about it, something that made his skin tighten on his scalp. He bent over it and read it.

THOMAS CRAIG.  
BORN — Dec'br, 1802  
Corwin, South Wales  
DIED —

That was all. The wrongness about it was that it was incomplete. In this old graveyard of the very dead was a marker for a man who, born in 1802, was not dead yet.

Thomas Craig.

Cyril sank down on his knees in front of the stone. It was not a gesture of reverence; it was something else. His mind was churning wildly under the influence of all these familiar stimuli. It had happened before, just like this. He remembered now. Once again he was that inquisitive, shy eleven year old boy.

That important evening, thirty years ago, the mine whistle didn't sound. It didn't sound because there was a sudden strike among the night shift workers. So Cyril had unwittingly lingered in the graveyard, oblivious to the falling darkness, completely engrossed in a skink he had captured. The shiny lizard-like creature darted about fascinatingly in the cigar box which Cyril invariably carried with him on these excursions. Boylike, Cyril had no intention of letting him loose just yet. Not until he had watched him and studied him and fed his mind on this new species of life.

On his knees in front of the stone, he suddenly was aware of being watched. Someone was standing right behind him. He whirled, overwhelmed with terror.

The man was tall, gaunt as a specter, his hair was long and his bony face was a white splash against the blackness of his clothes.

"Who— who are you?" Cyril gulped.

"My name is Thomas Craig," the man said.

Cyril's eyes raced to the stone in front of him. "But— he's— he's buried right here!"

The stranger smiled. "Not yet. Not for a long time, perhaps not— never mind. As you see, there is no death date on the stone."

CYRIL STOOD UP, clutching his cigar box and staring hard. The tall, spectral stranger who said he was Thomas Craig was like a blacker shadow against the dark sky. Yet he heard the windy slapping of his overcoat hem against his long thin legs. He was old— ancient old— but he wasn't dead, was he?

"What is your name?" the man inquired politely, while Cyril gaped.

"Cyril, sir."

"Good. I have seen you here many times, Cyril."

"You have?"

"Yes. But I didn't wish to frighten you, so I never spoke before.

But tonight when I saw you crouched here so late in the evening I thought you might have hurt yourself. That is why I spoke to you just now. Cyril, may I ask you why you come here so often. The rest of the townspeople fear this place."

Cyril gnawed his lower lip. Thomas Craig sounded friendly enough. His voice had an almost hypnotic quality. It was low and deep and resonant, as if it came from out of a great cavern. But Cyril was by nature shy with strangers, and he had had a scare.

He wanted to talk but as usual he couldn't think what he should say. He moved awkwardly, clutching his prize, but he could say nothing.

"I don't think you like people very much. Cyril. Well, neither do I. I am what you might call a hermit. I shun people, and they shun me. I myself am the strongest reason why they never come to this place. I did it on purpose Cyril. I prefer solitude, just as you do. I believe that you and I have a great deal in common."

"You do?"

"Yes. For example, I have often seen you examining the little creatures of Earth, creatures which ordinary people treat with such disrespect and even contempt. They fascinate you, don't they? For instance, I can see that you have caught a skink in that box. What do you propose to do with it, Cyril? Kill it?"

"Oh, no!" Cyril protested.

Thomas Craig nodded gravely. "That is good. It is as I said. You and I have a healthy respect for the lowly creatures of Earth. Who knows but what they are more important than we? You merely wish to examine this skink, and discover, if you can, his function upon Earth. You are, in fact, a biological scientist."

Cyril blushed. "I want to be. Maybe someday." But he was very proud at that moment. This hermit seemed to understand how he felt better than anybody else, even his mother.

So when Thomas Craig suggested that he come along with him to the place where he lived, Cyril followed obediently. The power of the hermit's hypnotic voice made him forget his dinner, and mother, and the mine whistle. His conscience, like the mine, was on strike.

IT WAS QUITE DARK by the time they reached the tattered hut where the hermit lived. It was carefully hidden away in the folds on the hills.

"Come in, Cyril," the hermit beckoned.

Cyril found himself blinking in the uneasy light of a coal oil lamp.

"You do not find yourself in a mansion, do you, Cyril?" Thomas Craig continued. "No, I have long since ceased to be intrigued by what are collectively referred to as the comforts and pleasures of this world. I have enjoyed them in my youth, but that was many years ago. Here I have everything I need to survive, and that is enough. Survive, Cyril! That is the principal thing! Survive!"

Perched up on an ancient square trunk, which had probably come around the Horn, Cyril kept his eyes fastened on the old hermit. Hence he scarcely was aware of any evidence of poverty. The hermit's eyes were like leaping flames in the lamplight. Cyril could not help looking at them.

"Come, Cyril! Don't you agree?"

"I—I guess so."

"Good! That is as it should be. The young do not wish even to think of death. I was like that, Cyril, from my very earliest childhood. But as I grew older I faced the fact of death squarely and I came to a momentous decision. Do you know what I decided, Cyril?"

"No-o."

"I decided that I would not tolerate death. I would not die!"

Cyril, awed, took a moment to compute. The gravestone said Thomas Craig was born in 1802. That meant he must now be almost two decades past one hundred years old. Cyril's eyes widened. All this concentration was readable in his expression.

"You are thinking of the tombstone," Thomas Craig said, smiling. "Yes, it is mine. My father had it erected over eighty years ago. There was a terrible influenza epidemic in the village and I was considered a goner. My father himself succumbed of it less than two years later. Perhaps, feeling the end near for himself as well as for me, he spent a good portion of his savings on tombstones for us both. A fine burial and all the trimmings was considered of great importance among our people.

"As for me, I had no intention of dying. This early illness of mine merely served to increase my intention to live forever."

"But how can you do that?" Cyril blurted. "Nobody can!"

"I believe a person can," the hermit said calmly. "Do you know how? Do you know what keeps me alive?"

Cyril shook his head as those flames came closer.

THE HERMIT TAPPED HIS FOREHEAD. "It's all up here, Cyril. Concentration and the will to live intensified a thousand degrees beyond what most men can achieve. You can't die if you will yourself

to live, and act in complete accordance with your will. Most men's will to live is a sickly thing in itself, and even when it is very strong in them they spend half their time poisoning or destroying their physical bodies. Cyril, there is power in the human mind—power beyond anything you could dream. Power over self, and over others. That is where most men fall down. They expend that power to control others, not themselves. They battle among themselves, they conflict, mind against mind. They are always trying to change someone else's thoughts and opinions, always in aimless search of something which will all too soon be lost to them.

"I learned early in life how wrong this is—this desire to impose one's will on another. I saved this mind-power for myself. I left the world to its squabbles. I learned to live happily alone, to train my mind, to concentrate on the one important thing—*survive!*"

Cyril stared. Half of what the hermit said was incomprehensible, and the part he could understand he could not believe. And yet what the old man said stirred human longing inside him. To live! To be—forever! To overcome the mortal inheritance of Death!

Thomas Craig looked down at him, his white face like a skull's face, the skin tight against his bones, and those eyes like great yellow flames in the lamp's light.

"Do you believe me?" he asked.

Cyril wet his lips.

"Do you?"

"Y-yes."

"No, you don't," the old man said. "Well, perhaps these will convince you." He proceeded to show Cyril letters and old miniatures and photographs with dates on them. These proved beyond question that Thomas Craig actually was born in South Wales in 1802. He showed Cyril his arms and his chest, where the muscles stood out like wires against the fleshless bones. Thomas Craig was a man of skin and bones—and an indomitable compulsion to survive. . .

"Can't *anything* kill you?" Cyril exclaimed.

The hermit showed his strong teeth in a grimace of hate.

"Yes! I have one Enemy—one strong Enemy! He is waiting to catch me off guard. Waiting . . . But he won't! My vigilance is perfect. Even while I am asleep a part of my mind is active—keeping my Enemy at bay. And I will survive in spite of him! I will! I will!"

His voice rose, and Cyril tumbled forward off his perch to flee into the night. A bony arm clutched him back.



"You can't go yet, Cyril. Not yet."

He quivered as those twin-flames burned close to him, as if to bore into his brain. He screamed.

"Don't be afraid. Listen, Cyril. Some day you are going to be a great biological scientist. When that day comes I want you to return here. I will teach you what I have learned and you will help me outwit my Enemy. You will come back, won't you, Cyril?"

Cyril nodded, swallowing hard.

"I can see the terror in your eyes, and also the truth. You are thinking that you would never come back, because you are afraid of me. But you will come back, Cyril. Even if I don't *will* you to. You will return because your fear of death is stronger than your fear of me.

"In a few moments you may go home, but first I must do something to protect myself. No one knows about me on the outside, and no one must know. Look into my eyes, Cyril. Look deep into my eyes . . ."

THE TWO FLAMES THAT WERE Thomas Craig's eyes dissolved. The graveyard, the lichened tombstones, returned. Cyril started up as from a fantastic dream. But it wasn't a dream! It had happened. This old graveyard, the gathering storm—everything—had combined to pull back the curtain which the hermit had deliberately placed over that part of his memory which he hadn't trusted the boy with. Cyril might have told someone about him—his mother, the villagers—or a scientist friend later in life. Thomas Craig's solitude might have been interrupted, his plan spoiled. And now perhaps the compulsion to return to Schaeffer was all part of the hermit's design for living forever!

Why? The Enemy Thomas Craig feared: Cyril was to help him outwit this Enemy; that was to be his share in the design.

Summer lightning flashed across the hollow. It etched the tombs white-ly against the black earth. The rolling of thunder echoed from the distant Sierras. Cyril turned his face toward the sky. The storm was almost on him. Soon those great black sacks would unlock their contents.

He must find shelter, he told himself. And yet another level of his consciousness knew that was not what sent him running out of Only Gone Before and down the hollow in the opposite direction from Schaeffer. It was an all-consuming desire to find that hut. To see for himself if Thomas Craig was still alive, waiting for him.

It was no easy matter. His mind held no recollection of the path, and the path to the hut was deliberately obscure. But he plunged blindly ahead, while flares of lightning burst across the surrounding hills and the

scraggling oaks and manzanita they clutched to their round bosoms. The rain came, now, in a frenzy. After a few moments Cyril was soaked to the skin. But he fumbled recklessly ahead through the ravening storm, sobbing his frustration.

When despair burned highest he saw the hut, squatting darkly on an outcropping of rock like a toad. His breath tore from his throat as he stumbled down to the door and fell against it. The latch inside gave way.

IT WAS BLACK INSIDE, cold and black and lifeless. Cyril mopped at his dripping hair and face, waiting. No sound. Nothing. He lit a match and found the oil lamp. Its wan yellow flickering put depth to the darkness; he turned the wick higher and blinked around him. The door was still open to the storm, so he closed it. Quieter, now.

There was the old trunk. It looked smaller now. His glance moved vaguely across a food cupboard with a few dusty dishes and cans in it, across a bookcase crammed with dusty books.

Then he saw the bed.

Cyril cried out. There was someone on the bed—Thomas Craig, or what was left of him. His clothes were half rotted off and poked through the musty rags were the intricate bone-structure of his skeleton. Further up, against a curious metal basin filled with liquid, was his grinning skull. No, not quite a skull yet. As he stepped closer in a paroxysm of terror and fascination he saw that some of the skin was there, and in the vague flicker of the lamp light he almost fancied he saw life deep in those eye sockets. But it was an illusion. It had to be.

"Dead," he mumbled, and turned away.

Right at this moment it was as if all his dreams had failed him. To have Thomas Craig alive was everything. It was a symbol. Like every other mortal, he too, had dared to hope. And now his hopes were dead.

He dragged his feet toward the door.

"Wait."

It was a brittle, metallic whisper. Or maybe the wind? Cyril turned and looked back, almost hopefully. He almost smiled at his own gesture. Of course it was the wind, rattling a loose hinge in this ancient hut. And yet . . .

At the door he hesitated. He forgot to breathe for an instant.

"Cyril," said the whisper, "I am glad to see you again."

He turned back to the bed, gasping. Outside the wind made furtive noises. He gaped down at Thomas Craig. The hermit had not moved; his strong skull's snarl teeth were clenched tight. They had not moved.

"You're dead, Thomas Craig," he told the hermit. "You're calling to me from beyond the grave."

"No," said the whisper. "I willed you to remember everything today, Cyril. I tried to reach you before, many times. But you were too far away. No, not physically. You could have been in Timbuctoo and still you would have responded. But you weren't ready to remember yet. Not until you came back to the graveyard. I waited for you to come back and remember. But now it is too late."

CYRIL STARED AT THE skeleton on the bed. He hadn't spoken; his jaws had not flexed. Yet the voice had come from him—from somewhere under his chest.

"It is a sort of radio," the whisper said. "It has an amplifier and a speaker in it, which is in tune with my brain. I was not sure of your telepathic powers so I made it, knowing that soon I would not be able to move or speak. I built it for you, Cyril. You are the only one who knows."

"But you're dead!"

"My brain is still alive, here in this basin."

"But your flesh—your organs! Your heart isn't pumping the blood to your brain!"

"Remember what I told you thirty years ago, Cyril? It is the brain that counts—only the brain."

"But—what feeds you?"

"The liquid in this basin has fed me for weeks now. Perhaps months. I have no conception of time in—in my position. But you are too late. Even a month ago we might have done it. But now the liquid has become polluted. My Enemy is near. My Enemy is already *in my brain!*"

The whisper became a shriek which mounted and mounted until mercifully the speaker could no longer reproduce it. Cyril moaned with it. He held the lamp closer.

"Tell me! Tell me who that Enemy is!"

"All my life," moaned the brain of Thomas Craig, "I fought to achieve perfect control over my brain. I have, I have! All your life you have studied biological sciences. One day I had hoped that together we might strike on the answer. But it has only been in the last few tortured days that I knew why we could not. It is the Enemy, and he has whispered the terrible truth to me. He waits, Cyril! He is far more clever than we! It is his right, his eternal privilege to . . ." There was a wailing cry. "He is taking me . . ."

The speaker created a sound like a faint, hideous tittering.

Then silence.

For a long time Cyril could not move. He stood over the lifeless skeleton like a man turned to stone. Then, with a curiosity that swept away the primitive fear in him, Cyril bent over and lifted Thomas Craig's skull. Then he dropped it and ran moaning into the night.

He ran like the damned, ran without purpose or destination. He needed no purpose or destination because suddenly he knew what every man's purpose and destination is. He realized now what Thomas Craig had hinted when he spoke of respect for the little creatures—because in the ultimate purpose of things they might be more important than man, in some subtle way inconceivable to man. He knew, too, from what source sprang his own fascination for these little creatures. He had been smug about it. He needn't have been. For his was the fascination of the savage for his gods.

Cyril needed no answer. A multiple streak of lightning had showed him Thomas Craig's Enemy and his Master—moving and writhing across what was left of him in the basin; the long wait ended.

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## The Reckoning

There are times when the rule book should be put aside, and this is one of them. By the book, the Leahy story came out slightly ahead of Williamson—but nearly 50% of the voters found Jack's novelet outstanding! It was the nearly 5% who disliked the tale whose scores dragged it down. But there is no doubt that Leahy was appreciated by most. The finals:

(1) *Wolves of Darkness*, Jack Williamson; (2) *In Amundsen's Tent*, John Martin Leahy; (3) *Out of the Deep*, Robert E. Howard; (4) *Transient and Immortal*, Jim Haught; (5) *The Bibliophile*, Thomas Boyd; (6) *The Ultimate Creature*, R. A. Lafferty.

# The Voice

by Nell Kay

Some of the material in the old *GHOST STORIES* follows the findings of the great researchers into psychical phenomena of the 19th century, the claims of the Spiritualists, and the teachings of metaphysical disciplines so to be believable to anyone who finds any of these plausible. But how anyone with any knowledge of the subject of haunts and apparitions could have assumed that this story was anything but fiction eludes us. No matter. For what it is, it is a compelling and bizarre tale; and it is quite evident that the magazine was not published with the serious student of the occult in mind.

THE TELEPHONE rang, and I hurried to answer it. It would be Bob, I thought, calling to let me know when to expect him; he was working late, that evening in 192—.

Lifting the receiver, I said, "Hello," and waited for a reply. To my surprise, none came. Again I spoke, but only the buzzing of the wires answered me. Puzzled, I replaced the receiver, and returned to my book and chair by the fire.

Scarcely was I seated, when the phone again rang; and again answering it, I was met with the same blank silence. Could someone be playing a joke?

*Our Haunted Taxi Ride*, by Ella Banks as told to Nell Kay, copyright 1928 by The Constructive Publishing Corporation for *GHOST STORIES*, July; no record of copyright renewal.

Presently Central came in: "Number, please?"

"You rang, Central," I said, rather annoyed and nervous.

"No, ma'am. Number, please?"

I put down the receiver, and returned once more to the fire. Again the phone rang. I answered immediately, but with the same results as before.

Thoroughly mystified, I began to fear mishap to Bob, and decided to call his office. We were living in our Manhattan apartment, not far from Riverside Drive, and though Bob's office was only a few blocks downtown, a sense of great distance from him crept over me, and I had difficulty in shaking off a fit of sudden and unreasonable depression.

I lifted the receiver, and waited nervously for the answer from Central. None came. Impatiently, I jiggled the hook up and down, and waited. Not a sound but the humming of the wires. My feeling of depression returned and enveloped me. I *must* get Bob. Was the phone out of order?

At that moment a voice came—or was it a whistling of wind on the wires? Dim and far off it sounded, but at last I made out words: "Come—water—help me—I can't find—water . . ." The voice trailed away into silence.

I stood appalled. It was a cry for help—but from whom? Water! *What* did the message mean? Was it someone fainting and wanting water to drink, or someone living near the water, needing help? If the latter then *what* water? The sea or one of the rivers?

Suddenly a brisk voice broke in, "Number, please?" and quickly I gave Bob's number. It was with ineffable relief that I heard his cheery voice at the other end of the wire.

"I was just trying to get you," he said. "I'm leaving now, Ella; I'll be home in fifteen minutes."

Thankful that he was all right, I returned to my book. But I couldn't read; that strange voice kept ringing in my ears.

When Bob came in, I told him about it. He looked suddenly a bit pale.

"Did you hear it, too?" he cried. "I wasn't going to mention it—I put it down to imagination, or crossed wires. While I was trying to get you—just before you got me—I was waiting to give Central your number, and I heard the very same thing!"

"Perhaps our wires were crossed somehow, each of us trying to get the other at the same time," I said, "and we both heard the same person talking. But I wonder what he meant. It sounded as if he was almost in despair at not being able to find what he had lost. And what do you suppose he meant by saying 'water'?"

We discussed the message during dinner but failed to arrive at any solution of the mystery. After we had eaten, we took our usual evening walk up brightly-lit Broadway.

As we re-entered our apartment, we heard the telephone ringing. I hurried down the hall, and lifted the receiver. As I did so a cold, dead certainty came over me that I was to hear again the strange voice: and my feeling proved correct.

Hardly giving time for the first cry to be uttered, I shouted quickly: "Who are you? And *where* are you? Tell me, and I'll come and help you!"

But the voice trailed away in the same moan as before, and above it I heard distinctly the clank of iron—a chain rattling, of a piece of metal thrown upon a cement floor. Then silence.

I was completely unnerved, and could not sleep that night. I felt that there was something back of it all—something for me to do. But what?

THE NEXT MORNING, when Bob had left for the office, I decided to take a walk along the Drive, and prolonged it until long past noon. On my way homeward, I found myself allured by a stack of books outside a second-hand bookstore kept by a man named Frowd. What book-lover can resist such a display! One is at once possessed by the hope that among those ancient volumes a literary treasure may be found. So, as usual, I paused to turn them over.

Suddenly, as I picked up one of the books, someone said at my elbow: "Oh, take it! Do take it!"

I turned around in surprise. The only person who stood beside me was a girl of about fifteen who was looking over some school books. Surely *she* had not addressed me in that strangely urgent tone? But there was no one else.

"Did you speak?" I asked politely.

"Huh? Me? No," she answered, staring at me.

Utterly mystified, I looked at the book in my hand. It was an old, clothbound copy of *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, written by an Army officer in the year 1848. I had picked it up idly, attracted by its old-fashioned printing and quaint pictures.

Well whoever it was speaking, I thought could not possibly have meant me—or this.

I was about to replace the book on the stand, when again came the strange, low voice in my very ear: "Take it—take it—do take it! O-o-o-oh!"

My blood ran cold. That last moan—it was the beseeching voice which had come over the telephone wires! Turning wildly around, I could discern not a soul who could have spoken to me. Even the high-school girl had walked away, and passers-by were hurrying along in complete oblivion of my presence.

"Taking that?" asked Mr. Frowd, coming from the recess of the doorway.

"Why—yes," I replied, not liking to refuse to purchase the book after looking at it so long.

As I walked away, with the book in my hand, I called myself a fool to have bought a dry-looking old Army report, which would not be of the slightest use to me, just because I imagined someone had told me to.

REACHING HOME, I scanned the pages closely, wondering if there might be some penciled note in the margin, which could explain the strong impulse that made me take the book. I found nothing, however, except a folded piece of what looked like an old map, which was inserted in a pocket made for some such purpose in the back cover of the book. It was torn and much creased, and part of the title was missing, and it did not appear to be any part of the country with which I was familiar.

When Bob came home that evening, he said: "Ella, I've been thinking over that peculiar message we both heard over the phone, and I believe it was someone in danger who managed to get to the phone and call a number at random, which happened to be ours.

"I believe the mention of water was meant to convey that they are somewhere down by the waterside. What brought it back to my mind again, was a rather strange experience I had this noon. I was passing Frowd's bookstore, and I had the strongest urge to stop and look at the books, and especially to pick up one which I lay on top of a pile."

"Bob," I said in a terrified voice, "was it—what book was it?"

"An old Army report of some kind," Bob replied.

I could not repress a cry, and he looked at me in surprise.

"Go on," I said—"did you buy it?"

"No," he answered. "It didn't look to be of any earthly use to me, but—Ella, you'll hardly believe me—as sure as I sit here, I heard a voice, that miserable, imploring voice that came on the phone, urging me to take that book. But it seemed so absurd—what good could a book like that be, if the idea was that we might find out how to help someone in need? An old Army officer's narrative! What do you suppose



this hallucination is all about? Why, Ella—what's the matter?"

I was shaking with cold fear. Hurriedly I told Bob that I, too, had had the same urge.

"And I *did* buy it," I said. "This afternoon. But I can't see any reason for it, Bob—there's nothing unusual in it. There's a bit of an old map slipped inside a pocket in the back cover, and there's a bit of old green ribbon glued on the pocket as if it had been tied up at some time; but I don't see what connection . . ."

"Map! Where is it? Maybe *that's* why we felt urged to get the book—for the map that's in it! Perhaps it's of the locality we should look for!"

"Oh, Bob! Could it be?" A sudden tremor of fear made me shiver involuntarily.

"I wouldn't say that," said Bob, "but it's certainly a kind of strong hunch, or presentiment! I think we can get telepathic messages if someone is very urgently needing us, or thinking of us, don't you?"

"Yes," I said, "because I've had them before, very often. But I'm quite at a loss regarding this one."

I gave him the old, creased bit of map; he opened it out upon the table, and we both leaned over it. Part of the title being missing, I had no idea what the map purported to represent.

At length, Bob said: "It appears to be part of the shoreline of Long Island, somewhere in Brooklyn. Here's the name 'Wallabout,' which is somewhere off the East River, I believe. See—here's a date, 1776, so it's a very old map, and appears to have had something to do with the Revolution, probably made during the war."

"Bob, the East River you said—that must be the water near which the person is who phoned! Let's go and look around down there! Do you suppose someone was going to commit suicide in the river? Or, maybe in some old waterfront house somebody is being imprisoned!"

"It's an awful wild-goose chase to go out on," he pointed out dubiously. "We don't even know for sure. . . And yet—well—all right. Tomorrow's Saturday, and I'll be free after noon, so if you like we'll go and look around there. I believe it's in the direction of the Navy Yard, though, of course, when this map was made, the land must have looked totally different from what it does now. Look at these farms marked, Ella—and now those are some of Brooklyn's busiest streets. 'Mill Pond.' Wonder what that is now? Filled-in-land, I suppose, with houses built over it."

AT ABOUT two o'clock the following afternoon, we were stand-

ing upon the sidewalk outside our apartment, irresolute as to just which mode of transportation to take, when a taxi drew up in front of us, and the door sprang open. Whether by pressure of an unseen spring, or of itself, I do not know, and at the time did not stop to think. The driver appeared to be either very sick or very cold; for he was huddled up so completely in a dark overcoat, cap, and muffler, that only his eyes were visible. And what unusual eyes they were!

We decided to take this taxi, because its sudden appearance gave our minds a final turn. We entered, and Bob gave the direction.

The driver, however, scarcely heeded him, but set off immediately at full speed as though he knew the way already and had been ordered in advance to take us there. It was altogether very strange and I remarked upon it to Bob; but Bob's attention was fixed upon the passing traffic with a strained intensity, and my own eyes followed his.

I soon saw the reason for his wild stare. We were racing at breakneck speed, taking not the slightest notice of traffic rules or policemen's signals. Pedestrians escaped death from under our very wheels; other vehicles seemed to scrape our mudguards and cut across our path with but an eighth of an inch to spare, and a rushing ambulance was overtaken, passed, and left behind by us in a couple of seconds. We gained such terrific speed that at last everything we passed became a mere blur. We rocked and swerved, rattled and raced, expecting that every moment would be our last.

Bob knocked on the dividing window (it would not open) and called out at the top of his voice, but the driver paid him not the slightest heed. All we could discern was a huddle of dark clothes and two dark gloved hands upon the steering wheel. These hands fascinated me. They were held in such a peculiar position, almost as if they were tied together at the wrists. They clutched the wheel like black claws, and never changed their position upon the rim. Indeed, the vehicle seemed to be driving itself, and the black figure simply hanging on.

"Bob," I cried, in breathless fright, "has the car got away from his control?"

"This man must be mad," he shouted, "or stone deaf!"

We tried knocking and gesticulating, but not the slightest notice did the strange driver take of us. The doors and windows resisted every effort to open them.

Suddenly, around a corner to meet us, came a huge coal truck, head on, into our front end. With a wild shriek I hid my face on Bob's arm, and awaited inevitable crash.

"Ella! " gasped Bob in a horrified voice. "Look up! We're past it—we went right through it! "

"Bob! *Through* it? "

"So help me, Ella, we went clean through that truck, taxi and all! And the truck driver never even seemed to see us! "

A dreadful fear clutched me. We were in an invisible cab—driven by a spirit from another world! Then I pulled myself together. How ridiculous! It couldn't be! We must surely have passed by the truck with such a close shave that Bob had imagined we went through it! I looked out. We had just crossed the Brooklyn Bridge like a streak of lightning and now were tearing down Hudson Avenue beneath the elevated trains. My blood froze as I noticed not a single man, woman, or child appeared to be able to see us! People crossed in front of us as unconcernedly as if we were a stationary post, or not there at all, and traffic policemen never gave us so much as a glance!

Now the elevated trains ceased to rumble over us, and the street became more sordid and shabby. Small, dingy stores and dingier tenements flew by, until we took a sudden turn down Evans Street (as I found it to be called, when we went over the ground again later) into Little Street. On down Little Street, the wretched-looking buildings going by in a dirty streak, until we seemed about to plunge straight through the fencing at the foot of it, and end that wild ride in the River. But, just as the fence was reached, we stopped with a jerk so sudden that we fell forward on the floor, and the doors sprang open.

WE ALIGHTED hurriedly and thankfully, withal in some indignation; and Bob was about to address the driver in none-too-peaceful terms, when the doors closed and the taxi whirled to the left, disappearing in the shadow of the overhead bridgeways connecting the buildings of the Edison Company's warehouse. We stood spellbound, looking to see it go rushing out into the open daylight beyond—but it completely vanished from our sight!

"Did the ground open up and swallow it? " I cried.

"Of all the mad, crazy drivers! " cried Bob.

"He couldn't have been a human being, Bob," I said. "He is some demon from another sphere. Did you notice his peculiar hands? "

"Yes," he answered. "Like black claws. Well, if we were urged to come here by any supernatural agency, we've certainly had a portentous beginning! "

Suddenly I caught Bob's arm. A dark figure came hurrying towards

us from under the shadows of the warehouse bridgeways. It was hurrying, yet came with a smooth, groping movement, almost as if blind, or hampered in some way from free motion. Its hands were closely clasped together in front, each drawn into the opposite cuff, and hidden.

"Bob! " I cried. "The driver! It's the same man! "

We drew back against the wall to let him come abreast of us.

As he neared us, we heard him muttering to himself, in a low, moaning voice: "Oh—where—where is it? I can't find it—the water—I can't find it."

That voice! It was the voice we had heard over the telephone! As the man came hurrying. I noticed that his footfalls made no sound, and his face was white, with a fearful wound gashing one side of it. Then there came the sound of clanking metal—the same sound which I had caught over the wires—though what or where it was, we could not make out.

"Say! "cried Bob, "are you the driver of that taxi we took? "

But the figure fled past, and never turned its head. We followed swiftly, but it kept ahead of us in silent flight.

"We've come to help you," I cried breathlessly. "We are the people you phoned to. Don't you hear us? "

But the hurrying form kept on. Up Little Street it glided, until reaching an old, dilapidated frame house on the left, it vanished in the recess of the broken door.

We stood still in a quandry. Dare we enter that deserted building? What might we find? Over the broken door was a number—thirteen. If you are ever down in that locality, you can find that old house quite readily, and you will see what we saw—a blackened, tumbledown frame building, with broken windows and shutters, and a rotting bit of iron fence in front.

IT WAS BEGINNING to grow dark, for at this time of the year the days close in early. A cold wind blew up from the River and rattled at the crumbling building, and beyond the dark entrance strange rags and cobwebs fluttered—or were there dim forms flitting up and down the rotting staircase?

Suddenly we heard that moaning, unhappy voice again, drifting from the gloomy recesses of the empty passage: "I can't find it—I must search on—I cannot rest until I find the place they lie in! These weights upon my hands oppress me—will no one free me? But I must keep on—until

—I find . . . "The hollow, haunting monotone faded into an indistinguishable murmur.

Suddenly my eyes were drawn upwards to the gaping windows. "Oh, Bob! " I cried. "Do you see anything at the windows? "

Bob looked up, but now they were dark and empty. Yet I could have sworn that staring, bloody faces had looked forth at me. I was shivering with uncontrollable fear. There did not appear to be a soul upon the street but ourselves, and evening had descended upon us with strange suddenness.

"Ella," said Bob in a low voice, "we came here on a presentiment that someone needed help, and it may be that in this very house that person is incarcerated. I have my flashlight with me, and I won't feel at ease unless we search this place."

"All right," I answered. "Only let me keep close to you, and don't go out of my sight."

Bob turned on his flashlight, and we entered the rotting passage.

"Ella! For God's sake, look there! " exclaimed Bob, drawing back sharply and steadying his light upon a huddled heap of something which lay at the foot of the staircase.

I looked, and my heart stood still; for, to my horror, I saw that the ghastly heap was a mound of bodies—there must have been eight or ten at least—thrown together, one on top of the other; and, of those which we discerned most plainly, the neckbands of their rotting coats gaped torn and bloody—they had each been beheaded, in a savage, ragged way, as if they had been literally gnawed!

Sick with horror, I turned and staggered back to the doorway. I felt that I would faint if I did not put that sight behind me and get a breath of pure, cold air. Bob came and stood beside me, and I could see that he, too, was white and shaking.

Presently he turned and threw the beam of his flashlight back upon the staircase, and we both looked in with fascinated eyes. With a shock of amazement we saw that those horrible, gnawed carcasses were gone!

With mutual impulse, we retraced our steps inside the hall, but could not find a trace of that ghastly heap.

"Ella, if there's been murder done here, I'm going to find it out, if possible. Are you game to search the rooms? "

"Yes, if you are: but don't leave me far behind. Bob, could they have been real bodies, or phantoms? "

"I don't know what to think. If they were real, then someone moved them awfully quickly and silently, while we stood in the doorway, and

it hardly seems possible we wouldn't have heard them. But let's look in the rooms."

Bob crossed over to the door leading into the front room on the ground floor, I following closely. It stood open, and the room beyond was dark and bare, except for a clutter of rubbish showing up dimly white in the far corner. As we stood in the doorway with palpitating hearts, Bob throwing the light around into each corner, a swift, dark figure sprang with such suddenness and liteness from behind the door, that it was gone before we realized we had seen it, out into the gloom of the fast lowering night.

Too terrified even to shriek, I hung on to Bob's arm in a half faint, trembling in every limb.

"What was it?" "I gasped. "Did you see it?"

"Yes," he answered. "It was a dark-skinned man—looked like a negro, to me. But he went so quickly I couldn't swear to it. Well, anyway, he's gone, so let's find out what's in that corner there, before we go."

WE CROSSED OVER to the corner where the litter of rubbish was piled, but suddenly I stood still, rooted to the ground in renewed horror. What was that grisly row of small, white shapes? A bleaching row of human skulls! I could bear no more.

I turned to run, but my foot slipped on something hard and smooth, which, as I recovered balance, went rolling in advance of me through the doorway and into the dusty hall.

Not stopping to discover what it was. I rushed out into the street, calling wildly to Bob to follow. I do not know how far I might have run from that awful place of death, had I not stumbled in my blind terror and given Bob an opportunity to overtake me.

At last, he succeeded in calming my overwrought nerves, and expressed a wish to return and finish our exploration of the rooms.

"Bob," I cried, "I don't know where you get such courage! Please don't ask me to enter that horrible house again!"

"All right, then," he agreed. "Of course I won't ask you if you feel that way, Ella. It's all horribly unnerving, but I hate to go home without solving the mystery."

"Dear," I said, "you're so wonderfully good about it, and I know you are just dying to search the rest of that old house; so listen: you

leave me here outside the railings, and I'll stay here while you go through it."

After some reassurance on my part, Bob left me, with instructions that if anyone came along, or I was the least bit frightened, I was to call out immediately, and he would be on the alert to hear me. He had not been gone a moment, however, when he returned with something in his hand.

"This is the thing your foot slipped on," he said. "I picked it up in the hall. It's a tooth!"

"A tooth! Was it out of one of those skulls?"

"Now you mention it, I did notice a rather unusual thing: hardly any of those gruesome things had any teeth left. I don't believe I've ever known of such a coincidence before, either, because the teeth as a rule don't decay, after death."

"Well, the skulls, at any rate, are real," I observed; "that is, if this tooth is from one of them. Have you looked to see if they have disappeared, too, Bob?"

"No. I just picked this up in the hall. And I'm not going to go through the house, after all, Ella, unless you come, too. I can't feel easy at your staying here alone."

I saw that he was in earnest, and I really did not want him to return home unsatisfied; moreover, now that I had recovered my equilibrium, my own courage was returning, and so I persuaded him that I now felt perfectly brave, and wanted to go through the rooms with him. Accordingly, after some hesitation, he led the way, and we re-entered the room on the ground floor. I was scarcely surprised to find that the row of grisly skulls had indeed disappeared, just as that dreadful heap of bodies had. A sudden thought struck me.

"Bob," I asked, "do you think those skulls were the ones which had been severed from those bodies in the hall, and that the dark figure we saw was the murderer?"

BOB WAS ABOUT to reply, when a sound caught our ears, and we stood still with fast-beating hearts. It was the sound of a swinging chain—the sound we had heard before. Glancing fearfully up the stairs, we discerned in the gloom the driver of the haunted taxi descending them.

"Let's follow him," I whispered.

Bob nodded.

As the figure passed us, I saw that the hands were still held in front,

and now, as I looked more closely, I caught a glimpse of the wrists—and I started back in horrified surprise as I saw that they were manacled! A chain ran from one to the other, and the swinging of the chain, as the figure moved, was the metallic sound we heard.

The dark-clad figure passed on out into the street, and we followed quickly. His footsteps did not make a sound upon the pavement, and his pace was swift and smooth: only the slight chink of the swinging bit of chain told us that he was still ahead of us when the shadows enveloped him. He was no longer dressed in the black overcoat and cap, but seemed to be clad in the ragged remains of a soldier's uniform. We followed him in and out of those little streets and byways, in a seemingly aimless pursuit. Every now and then, he paused at dark alley entrances to peer into their gloom in search of something. Then, with a moan and shaking of the head, he passed on again.

We had turned into Hudson Avenue by a cross street from Little Street, and back into Little Street through another connecting alley: and now the mysterious figure paused at the corner of a short, blind lane called "United States Street." An imposing name enough, but surely the name of our country was never given to a blinder, shabbier alley than this! The hurrying figure then sped suddenly down this short turning, and, as we were about to follow, he completely and swiftly disappeared.

We could not credit our senses. Surely he must have turned in somewhere. Perhaps the street was not a blind one, after all. We looked more carefully. Beyond the house on the corner was a brick wall, and another wall closed the end. Some piles of old lumber were laid there, and a few frame houses in a most wretched condition of deterioration stood on the opposite side. These, horrible though they appeared, were evidently inhabited. There was no way possible for that tattered figure to have disappeared unless he passed right through the wall of solid brick across the end. Above this wall we could see a gauntry, built over the water.

"Bob," I whispered, "if this is the water he is searching for, he must have found it if he went beyond that wall, and now perhaps he will be at rest. But who on Earth is he? And *what?*—man, or spirit?"

"Surely he can't be anything supernatural, Ella," cried Bob. "It can't be possible! I feel as if I've been in a strange kind of trance all the while we've been following him, and just awakened. We *can't* have been seeing a ghost! Such things don't . . ." he broke off abruptly, and his eyes stared beyond me.

I wheeled round, possessed by fear of I don't know what, and saw



a dark, running figure, carrying some small objects cupped in his hands, which every now and then he spilled as he ran, and paused a moment to stoop and pick up. It was, I felt certain the same dark figure which had sprung forth from behind the door in the deserted house.

HE WAS TALL, slim, and dark—a negro, I thought at first, but Bob said, no, he was a Malay or Lascar—and his teeth gleamed from his panting lips. He was coming toward us, but as we turned to look at him, he uttered a wild cry, wheeled round without pausing, and sped as swiftly in the opposite direction. With common impulse we gave chase. How brave I was, when the thing I feared fled *from* me! Had he continued to run toward us, I, for one, would have taken to my own heels just as swiftly as he now took to his.

Down Little Street he ran, we following, and all along the way the things in his hands were dropping, one by one, with a rattle on the pavement. Casting a quick glance at them, as I ran beside Bob, I saw to my horror that they were teeth—human teeth!

Now I felt quite certain that this Lascar was a murderer, and had killed that horrible pile of men, and was perhaps taking home their teeth in savage gloating, as trophies, as the Indians took scalps. He was now running full tilt into the fencing at the bottom of Little Street, beyond which is a bit of ground then the River.

"Now we'll corner him," gasped Bob. "He can't get through, and I don't believe he even sees the fence! "

To our horrified amazement, however, the figure continued his wild race without a moment's pause or hesitation, and passing clear through the fencing, disappeared on the bank of the river.

We stood still and stared. Was the Lascar, then, not human? If not, what could he be? Were we both going out of our senses?

"Oh, Bob," I cried, "I do believe there's some dreadful spell cast over this locality, and we're seeing things which don't exist. Let's get away and go home, before something worse happens! "

Bob agreed. It was getting quite late now, and the district is not one of the nicest to be in, at a late hour. There seemed no chance of picking up a taxi in that neighborhood, so we started to walk until we should be able to find one.

Hardly had we taken a few steps in the direction of home, when the headlights of a cab turned the corner from the blind alley, where the manacled man had vanished, and the driver drew up beside us.

FEAR SWEEPED over me. I knew, even before I looked, who the Driver would be. It would be that same, mysterious, handcuffed man again. No one else would, or could, have come from that queer little alley, in which it was surely an utter impossibility for any taxi driver to pick up a fare or to have deposited one. A single glance at the dark, huddled form with the glowing eyes convinced me that my fear was correct—it was the same driver who had brought us here, and the same strange figure we had followed to and from the rotting house.

Bob, however, did not seem to recognize him, and appeared only too relieved to find a cab where he least expected to be able to get one.

"Bob," I cried, "don't you see who it is? Oh, don't get in and take another dreadful, crazy ride like we had before!"

But Bob was helping me inside, and did not seem to hear me. Almost without any volition, I felt myself compelled to enter and sit down. It seemed as if a spell were cast over the two of us. Bob followed me in, the door closed, and away we went at the same naniacal breakneck speed as before, and it being now dark, the terror was increased a thousand-fold.

"Bob," I shouted, frightened by the strange look on his face, "don't you hear me?"

He turned to me suddenly, and seemed to wake. "Ella how did we get into this crazy taxi again?"

Bob was utterly at a loss to account for the oblivion which had come over his senses. Now that we were in the taxi, however, we knew from our previous experience that nothing would arrest our speed, so we again resigned ourselves to a blood-curdling race through the streets.

So thankful we were, when we at last drew up beside the curb outside our own apartment building, that we did not pause to wonder how the driver came to bring us there when we had given him no directions as to where we lived or wished to go. No sooner had we alighted, than again the cab whirled from our sight and appeared to vanish utterly when halfway down the block. Completely mystified, but extremely relieved to be once more safe at home, we took the elevator to our floor, and soon sank gratefully into our chairs.

As we talked over our terrible and utterly incomprehensible experiences, I said, "Bob, when his wanderings seemed to be always down by the River, why was it he wanted water? Why couldn't he find it, if the River was what he wished to locate?"

"I think there must be something else he meant," Bob answered. "I'll tell you what, Ella: let's take that bit of old map up to the Public Library and compare it with those they have there, and see what it really is. I believe the solution of all this lies in that map! Then we can read up on what happened around that time—I've got a bit rusty on history, I must confess—and I believe we shall find the explanation."

I AGREED GLADLY. And so we did: and we found that this old map was made at the time of the Revolutionary War, and it covers the ground which Bob and I went over in pursuit of those horrible apparitions. But at the time the map was made, it was mostly all farmland. The "Mill Pond" has long since been filled in.

"Bob," I said, "the water—I believe the water he was searching for was the Old Mill Pond! You know, he appeared to have the remains of an old uniform on, and as this map was made during the Revolution I believe he was a soldier. The Mill Pond was possibly a landmark near where his comrades were buried, and perhaps himself, too, and in making the streets perhaps the graves were disturbed; and his spirit went wandering, and couldn't find a resting-place again, not even the old landmark where he was first laid—by the old pond."

"That may be. I remember his words—'I cannot rest until I find the place they lie in'—perhaps you're right, Ella, and he was looking for some of the graves that were disturbed when the streets were laid out. But why was he haunted? "

Bob now located a volume which seemed to contain references which

It may be a three-way tie! The letters and votes are pouring in, and one enthusiastic reader places THE PYGMY PLANET, by Jack Williamson in first place; another says, no, Williamson's fine, but my vote goes to THE CITY OF SLEEP, the third in the famous "Man Who Awoke" series, by Laurence Manning; and just to keep things stirred up, others, while praising the two stories above, find that much-asked for old tale, PLANE PEOPLE, by Wallace West, the best.

*You Can Get Into The Argument; You'll Find These Stories In*

## FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION

*The Big 5th Issue, Winter, Is Now On Sale*

might give us the explanation we sought. It did, at any rate, prove that we were on the right track. The book was entitled *A History of the City of Brooklyn and Kings County*, by Stephen M. Ostrander, M.A., Volume 2, and it was published in Brooklyn "by subscription" in 1894. In chapter nine we read:

"During the whole period of the Revolution Brooklyn had been peculiarly disturbed. . . . Farms had been pillaged and the property given over to friends of the Governor.

"The Battle of Long Island was fought August 27, 1776. . . . Victories gave the British between 4,000 and 5,000 prisoners, and quarters had to be provided for them. The horrors of the city prisons were more than repeated in the tragedies of the prison ships in the bend of the Wallabout."

"The same part of the river where we were, Ella!" said Bob.

We read on: "Each prisoner was conducted to the hold of the vessel, to become the companion of a thousand other patriots, many of whom were covered with rags and filth, and pale and emaciated from the constant inhalation of the pestiferous and noxious atmosphere which impregnated the vessel. Typhus fever, dysentery, smallpox, and the vilest malaria were common."

Continuing to read, we learned that when the poor wretches pressed towards the hatch to get a breath of air, the sentinels thrust their swords among them savagely, not caring who nor how they sliced.

"How horrible!" I said, shuddering. "No wonder those dreadful faces I caught sight of at the windows of that old house were so gashed and bloody! They were the spirits of these poor wretches who died on the prison ships, Bob—don't you think so?"

"Might be—if you believe you really saw them, Ella. But let's read on."

We continued: "The morning salutation was, 'Rebels, bring out your dead.' . . . Prisoners were allowed to sew a blanket over the remains of their dead companions before burial. The dead were taken in boats to the shores, put in holes dug in the sand, and carelessly covered. Frequently they were washed from their resting place by the incoming tide. . . . In the '50's of the present century it was no uncommon thing for pieces of bone and human skulls to be dug on the borders of the old road."

"Oh, Bob," I cried, "such inhuman treatment may well cause the spirits to haunt the scenes of their misery!"

While I spoke, Bob had been turning over the pages of another volume, *The History of Long Island*, by Benjamin F. Thompson, Volume One. He now pointed to a footnote on page 244, and asked me to read it. I read:

"On the 4th of February, 1841, some workmen, while engaged in digging away an embankment in Jackson Street, near the Navy Yard, accidentally discovered a quantity of human bones, among which, horrible to relate, was a skeleton having a pair of *iron manacles still upon the wrists.*"

"The manacled man!" I cried. "Then we really *did* see a spirit!"

"I can't credit it," said Bob, "and yet—we were certainly in the very same district where this grave was disturbed—Hudson Avenue used to be called Jackson Street at that time, you know."

"If one believes in spirits at all," I said, "it is no cause to wonder at, if the spirit of the poor, shackled man did go wandering around, after having his remains disturbed, and not being able to locate his resting-place again."

"But," added Bob, "we still haven't found anything to explain those murdered men who were so horribly beheaded, and the Lascar and those ghastly skulls."

"Let's search for another historical record," I said.

WE DID SO, and at last our efforts were rewarded, for, on page eight of the "Illustrative Notes" towards the end of a volume entitled *Notes, Geographical and Historical, relating to the Town of Brooklyn, on Long Island*, by Gabriel Furman, we read the following gruesome extract:

"On the banks of the river, a little to the east, was a knoll of land, where several hundred American prisoners were buried. The heads of the westernmost row were exposed to the lashing of the waves of the River, by which means they were beaten off from the trunks."

And, reading further, we found it recorded that a certain Lascar "made a considerable amount of money by selling the teeth, taken from these heads, to the dentists of New York City."

"Bob! "I exclaimed in horror, as we finished reading. "That Lascar we followed—don't you think it must have been the ghost of the one referred to here? He must have taken those teeth he had, from the skulls we saw—the skulls *did* belong to those bodies, then!"

(Turn to page 118)

# The Monsters

by Murray Leinster

MURRAY LEINSTER first appeared in *WEIRD TALES* in the August 1925 issue, with a tale entitled *The Oldest Story in the World*. He did not appear there often; only three other titles are listed in my indices, one of them a three-part serial. This, I think, is the best of the four, a combination of science and horror which is still vital.

DANNY BURTON very justly has the credit of having ended the menace of the Monsters, but according to the records it was Patrolman Schwartz, Shield 5023, who actually saw them first, that evening in 1932. On the log at his precinct station it is down in black and white: "10:16. Emergency call from Patrolman Schwartz, Shield

5023, reporting giant spider in middle of 46th Street. Ambulance sent for him, with relief."

It is fairly clear that Patrolman Schwartz was assumed to be suffering from prohibition horrors, and that trouble was in store for him.

However, the record goes on: "10:20. Emergency call. Motorcycle Officer Casey. Giant centi-

*pede, forty feet long, outside 819 W. 53rd Street . . .* " That entry was never finished because of "10:21. *Riot call from Times Square, Giant insects attacking crowds . . .* " And that was broken into by: "10:22. *Ambulance and reserve call. Hoxby's Theater. Panic. Giant spider . . .* " And from there the log of that one particular precinct trails off into incoherence. The next four or five lines, as well as they can be translated from the increasingly agitated illegibility of the desk-man read as follows: "10:24. *Subway station 48th Street blocked . . . giant worm . . . moth fifth avenue sixty feet l—Bees big as cows traffic blocked fifty-seventh big beetle holy mother reserves riot guns caterpillar . . .* "

There is no use following that record farther. It contains no really intelligible statement for the better part of three-quarters of an hour. Then it begins, raggedly, to record the reports of police on riot duty regarding ambulances routed to divers hospitals with the number of people packed in each one, of emergency hospitals hastily improvised in smashed-open stores, and such data as must be made available to a central organizing office even while a calamity is going on. And the Monsters, even on their first appearance, did constitute a calamity. The toll of dead and injured for that first night made Danny Burton feel rather sick when

he saw it in his own newspaper, and as a reporter on the *Tabloid* Danny was inured to the dishing-up of the gruesome and the lurid for the *Tabloid's* particular lip-reading public.

It may be that Danny's reaction to that casualty list was the most significant thing about the first appearance of the Monsters, though he was assuredly the last person on Earth to seem of any importance in connection with them. Danny was twenty-five; he earned thirty dollars a week on the *Tabloid*, and his occupation was the uncovering of such facts as would justify the production of composite photographs to go under headlines like; "LOVE NEST RAID BARES TRAGEDY," and "RUM KING BEGS MERCY OF ENEMIES." He shared an apartment with Tommy Burns, who worked in a bank and dreamed dreams of television apparatus, and with Dick Thomas, who kept the bathroom in a mess with his photographic chemicals. Danny, himself, cherished an ambition to write plays. The three of them were as unpromising a group of youngsters as ever failed to set the world on fire. But it happened that through Danny Burton the trio had their pictures in the papers for three days running. And more important, the menace of the Monsters was removed.

In justice, though, we should

give due credit to Patrolman Schwartz, Shield 5023. He saw them first.

OFFICER SCHWARTZ'S footsteps echoed hollowly as he strolled with ponderous tread along the nearly empty street. It was a little after ten. Behind him, the traffic on Fifth Avenue had dwindled to a spaced separate flow of purring bodies which could even be picked out as individuals as they flashed across the street intersection. Ahead of him, an elevated train growled swiftly past, above Sixth Avenue. On either side were tall, silent buildings showing here and there a single illuminated window two or three stories up, and showing now and again a quiet, discreetly lit ground-floor space which was either a nondescript coffee-house or a tea-room specializing in privacy. A taxicab had stopped before one of these last. A girl stood abstractedly by while her escort settled with the chauffeur. A surface car rumbled flimsily up Sixth Avenue. Patrolman Schwartz paused and regarded a shop window displaying a delicately folded outfit of lingerie.

One of the irregularly spaced lighted windows above him turned dark. The light inside had been snapped out. The man and girl by the taxi moved across the sidewalk and entered the tea-room. It was also — as Patrolman Schwartz

knew with a vast calmness — a speakeasy. There was a dull, muted roar everywhere in the air. It was the voice of New York at night. The stars were dimmed by the competing glare of the city's myriad lights. Far away, over on Broadway, the corner of an electric sign winked elaborately in a wriggling pattern of colored sparks. A taxi-horn blew raucously. The air had the smell of dust and exhaust fumes and asphalt, with a bare trace of an acrid odor which was probably needle beer somewhere near by, and altogether it was a peaceful and normal evening on Patrolman Schwartz's beat.

Then it happened.

THERE WAS A shadow overhead. Something soared in a steep arc through the air, descending. A vast bulk alighted with an utter soundlessness upon the exact middle of the pavement. There was an involved, intricate pattern of interweaving angular objects, all of it utterly without sound. Patrolman Schwartz stopped in his tracks. The street noises and the city roar were to him sheer quietness, and that quietness was utterly undisturbed. He stared blankly at the twisting, writhing pattern of tangled things. On account of their size, those things looked to Patrolman Schwartz like small steel girders — say, five or six inches in



thickness. But no mass of steel would writhe and twist with such monstrous swiftness, and especially no thing of steel could move without sound. This thing was alive! But the whole affair was so completely impossible that for a moment Patrolman Schwartz was not even frightened. He was only amazed.

Then somebody screamed. Man or woman, Patrolman Schwartz never knew, but that shriek of unbelieving horror broke the paralysis that bound him. Patrolman Schwartz moved. More, he moved nearer to the writhing mass in the street. Instinctively, he clutched his night-stick. He had gone ten paces before his eyes told him what it was he saw. He had gone twenty before his brain would credit it. He turned on his flashlight and shot its beam upon the still moving, still soundless mass. And then Patrolman Schwartz's breath left him in a choking gasp and he knew stark panic.

The weaving steel girders were legs, monstrously horned and spiked. A rounded bulk amongst them was a belly. And the legs were easily fifteen feet in length, and there were eight of them, and the belly was not less than six feet in diameter, and before the belly there was a face— Patrolman Schwartz had no impression of a head or neck, but only of a face— which was so monstrously inhuman and so inhumanly monstrous

that he felt his throat working to utter a scream echoing the one he had heard a little while since. The Thing was a spider! A spider that filled the middle of the road!

There were eyes which glowed an insane ferocity. There was a slaving opening which was a mouth, and beside it ghastly feelers, clawed and jointed. And the Thing was busy with another smaller Thing beneath it, which it was killing horribly. While the policeman stood frozen, the smaller Thing ceased to kick and the Monster remained squatting upon the asphalt of Forty-sixth Street, in New York, and began to eat its prey. And there was no sound whatever. Not even the champing of jaws or ripping noises as the smaller creature was crunched and crushed and devoured.

Patrolman Schwartz had watched, paralyzed, while a giant spider bigger than a draft-horse slaughtered a smaller living thing of which he could only be sure that it was not human. But then, quite suddenly, the shaking man swore deeply. Tremblingly. Then he put his whistle to his lips and blew shrilly. He was trembling, but he got out his revolver while he blew, and he pounded on the sidewalk with his nightstick.

Heads appeared. Somebody in evening clothes appeared around a corner.

"Get back!" roared Patrolman Schwartz. "Get back!"

There came a sputtering of motors as he blew his whistle again. A motorcycle cop. Then another patrolman, running. A murmuring noise began strangely on the seemingly deserted street. There were short, sharp little strangled cries. People saw the Thing in the middle of the pavement. They could not see it—mercifully—as clearly as Patrolman Schwartz could see it, but they felt horror. Windows crashed shut. Two more cops. Three. They goggled unbelievably at the shape they could not see clearly, when Patrolman Schwartz told them what it was.

He led the way to show them, and afterward his flesh crawled at the memory of his own daring. He went within ten yards of the feasting Thing. It lifted its Face . . . The cops drew back, shivering.

"There's nothin' to do," said Patrolman Schwartz unsteadily, "but call Headquarters for a machine-gun. An' keep people away from this dam' thing . . ."

The policemen shakily took up posts to close the street. Police whistles bring crowds quickly, in New York. Already there were people coming. A woman was screaming monotonously in some room above . . .

Patrolman Schwartz made his report and was instantly convicted of having the horrors. He returned to his post and stood guard. Nothing happened. The Thing ate horribly but without a sound. If its belly had not been six feet through, if its legs would not span a circle thirty feet across, it would have been a spider. A spider! And it paid no attention whatever to its surroundings. It feasted, terribly, upon that smaller Thing it had slaughtered . . .

There was a stout, white-faced policeman with his revolver in his hand, watching it. There were other policemen warning crowds away from it, keeping the street clear with profanity and nightsticks—and with cold sweat on their foreheads. The giant spider ignored them all. It was feeding. And Patrolman Schwartz watched it.

He has nothing more to do with the story of the Monsters. He simply saw them first.

THE SECOND MAN was Motorcycle Officer Casey. He turned into Fifty-third Street at top speed, leaning well inward. There were people coming out of that street "like"—as he explained lucidly afterward—"bats out of hell with the lid off." There was pandemonium there. Somewhere there were two houses full of people all screaming at once, and the sidewalks were streaming fleeing

people, old and young, who even violated that most fundamental of all New Yorker instincts and left the sidewalks to run away in the middle of the street.

Motorcycle Officer Casey swerved violently to avoid running squarely into a hugely fat man who fled silently with fixed, glassy eyes. Figures were running toward him in the strangest, most awful panic he had ever seen. They fled like folk who have gazed into the deepest pit of hell. And save for those who still screamed monotonously, these fugitives from a yet unguessed-at terror ran in an utter panic-stricken silence.

The mob in flight thinned suddenly. Casey emerged into clear space, looking for the cause of the trouble. But he looked through emptiness for half a block and saw the backs of another thinning mob, fleeing in exactly the same fashion but in the opposite direction. There was one human figure on the sidewalk, either crushed or fallen in the terror-ridden flight, just before the houses from which the pandemonium of a madhouse came. But Casey knew something of panics, and those screams were hysteria. They were unvarying, rhythmic—definitely not the screams of people who watch a crime in process of commission.

Casey could never tell what made him look up. It was probably a movement. But he did

look up, and saw Something coming smoothly and with a queer rippling motion down the side of the house. It was all of forty feet long. Its body was not less than three feet in diameter. It was a centipede—but it was forty feet long! It was colossal. It was monstrous. And it came smoothly and with a sinuous, rippling motion down the six-story building front. The human figure lay on the sidewalk before that building.

Motorcycle Officer Casey's breath whistled between his teeth. He knew terror. Stark panic. He knew pure and unadulterated horror. When he tumbled off his motor-bike, raised that limp figure from the sidewalk, and leaped back to give the bike the gas, he was hardly conscious of the movements of his own body. He was possessed of an unreasoning terror of the monster Thing that was only sixty feet away—forty feet away . . . twenty feet . . . Then the motor-bike shot off like a thing possessed.

The monster centipede reached the ground, arched its body and flowed across the street—which it filled from building-wall to building-wall—and then rippled obscenely up the wall of that other building . . .

AND THEN Times Square. The middle of the theater-time. Nobody can do more than guess what the death-toll would have been if

the Monsters had first appeared an hour later, when the streets would have been thronged from curb to curb with crowds from the ended shows. It was bad enough anyway, though there was only a trickle of people on the sidewalks, movie-shopping, and sedentary groups outside a few of the theaters, smoking between the second and third acts. Even the vehicular traffic was light—for Times Square.

The electric signs blazed and twinkled and made those angular, jerky movements designed to invest "*Borhams, For the Gums*" and "*Ponds Clothes*" and "*Wellmax Coffee*" with the special form of sex-appeal which leads to a large and popular sale. The ground quivered now and again with the roaring passage of subway trains beneath. Surface cars crawled along with their absurd effect of being anachronisms in a modern city. Cars of every sort, with taxis predominating, sped along the intersecting streets . . .

And then the Monsters appeared.

Nobody saw where they came from. Something vast and winged soared clumsily into view to southward, dodged the jagged spires of skyscrapers, and then spread huge wings stiffly and alighted soundlessly in that triangular concrete park which is between Broadway and Seventh Avenue just north of their intersection. There it folded its

wings and was still for an instant. It was fifty feet long, and jet-black, and—it was an insect! It looked up ten feet or more from the pavement. It had colossal faceted eyes a yard or more across, which seemed to glitter in the lights about it. It had curving, tapered antennae which quivered and moved about curiously and were nearly as long as the rest of its body.

The street noises of Times Square changed abruptly. The traffic tumult changed. Brakes squealed swiftly. A cop's police-whistle blew. There was an indecisive, milling confusion among the folk on foot. Then another Monster appeared.

This one came out of nowhere, slithering agilely down the windowed sides of the old Times Building. It was a great bulk fifteen feet in diameter with legs of an incredible vastness. It was a spider . . . And then something huge tumbled clumsily over the roof of Loewe's Theater and spread colossal wings to break its fall, and bounced hugely from the sidewalk. . . . It was a beetle, green in color, but obscenely fat. It writhed and wriggled crazily, getting itself upright again, while motorcars stopped with smoking tires to keep from running into it—because its bulk was that of a moving-van. It heaved itself erect and began to walk down the middle of Seventh Avenue in an extraordinary, machine-like

preoccupation, its antennae moving weirdly, its ghastly mandibles outstretched before it.

Then the panic really began. The motored traffic fled. The humans ran screaming. A policeman began to shoot, his revolver booming thinly through the uproar of yells and shrieks from human beings in the uttermost of terror. But a few — a very few — people looked upward at the beast of mighty wings, and saw a butterfly vaster than any man-created aircraft, soaring past in the glow of the lights below. And some people saw a creature scuttling across the roofs with an unholy celerity and told tales of its awesome aspect afterward. But just then there was only panic.

There was only one man in Times Square who kept his presence of mind for even a few seconds. He was a news photographer for the *New York Tabloid*. He had a news-camera up in an office of the Longacre Building. He had been preparing to photograph the after-theater crowds for the Sunday rotogravure section, using the German film which is sensitive to the light of incandescent bulbs. This man snapped pictures before he fled. He got a clear picture of the monstrous spider just as it gathered itself for a leap from the Times Building. He got a rather blurry snapshot of the beetle advancing down Seventh Avenue amid the

maddened efforts of those in traffic to escape. And he had packed up his films, intending to abandon the camera for haste in flight, when he saw the beginning of the battle between the giant spider and the black creature in the concrete park. He paused for one more snap. That picture is almost clear. It shows, besides the titanic struggle of the two Monsters, the first of that affray of scurrying tumblebugs — only ten feet long or so — which came waddling out of West Forty-fifth Street.

The queer thing about the Times Square appearance of the Monsters was that apparently nobody noticed that their flight, their marching, and even the terrific battle between the giant spider and the cricket were absolutely, utterly soundless.

## 2

THE DEATH-LIST in Times Square was long, but the appearance of a giant spider in Hoxby's Theater was a really major catastrophe. The cathedral of the talkies was full to capacity, and eighty-odd musicians were mute while Leonora Black, upon the screen, listened yielding to the vocal sex-appeal of a notable he-man with a dimple in his chin. A closeup of the seductive one's face, showing the dimple clearly, was on the screen at the time of the catastrophe.

There was very probably an atmosphere of pure rapture in Hoxy's Theater at that moment, with each female in the audience imagining herself the person so delectably tempted to agreeable sin.

But a movement up near the ceiling of the vast edifice brought a shrieking uproar from the top balcony. The building shook with the outcry. Then it quivered with the trampling of feet in awful, blind, unreasoning flight. And eyes in the orchestra even tore themselves away from the scene on the screen, which would presently have turned out to be quite respectable.

A spider was spinning a web up near the ceiling. There would have been nothing alarming in that, save for the fact that the spider's belly was five feet across, and that its legs were inches thick and yards long, and the web it was spinning was as large as a steel cable. But those things accounted for the panic. For an instant there was the paralysis of utter horror. And then the spider, working preoccupiedly upon its web, began to drop toward the center of the orchestra floor, clinging to the cable of web it spun behind it. . . . It dropped toward the crowd beneath. . . .

The panic which followed would have been historic had it been alone. The roll of dead and wounded, trampled on and crushed, matches the casualty list of a minor

battle. But the panic in Hoxy's Theater was not alone. There was the panic in the Forty-eighth Street subway station, when a glistening yellow slug—a blind Thing—came crawling out of the uptown tunnel and squirmed up upon the passenger platform and human beings went mad with terror because the Thing was yards in diameter and blind and horrible. . . . And there was the moth that came reeling down from the sky with something smaller but still vastly terrible pursuing it, and blocked traffic on Fifth Avenue. . . . And there were the three bees—they were fifteen feet long, and their stings were like barbed harpoons—and a caterpillar. . . .

DANNY BURTON saw the caterpillar. He was writing on a play at the time, working in his shirt-sleeves in the living room of the flat he shared with his two friends. He was struggling with the recurrent temptation that afflicted him. Danny knew, of course, that you can be artistic, or you can be popular. And to be artistic you have to imitate Eugene O'Neil or one of a select list of other playwrights. Danny was suffering from the urge to write this particular scene—as he had been tempted to write others—in a way that was not artistic at all, but was merely true. But he fought down the temptation and plugged on, keeping his

psychopathic elements clearly in view and sternly restraining his protagonist's tendency to run away from the artistic into the authentic.

Then he heard the roar outside. It was a sort of growling tumult, interspersed with thin and high-pitched noises which sounded like women screaming. He lifted his head. Then he heard a crash. It was the sort of crash that is instantly identified. The screech of tortured metal, the metallic clamor, and then the frightened screaming of somebody who has seen an automobile accident and screams instead of doing anything intelligent.

Then, of course, there should have come a frightened hush, and afterward the hum of babbling conversation. But nothing of the sort occurred. The crash and the screaming did not interrupt the growing roar of a panic-stricken crowd for even an instant.

Danny went to the window. He looked down. The street was full from gutter to gutter. People were running away from something, ed-dying crazily about lamp-posts and other insurmountable obstacles in their path. From their throats there seemed to rise a sort of composite hoarse growling sound like nothing Danny had ever heard before. There were two cars in a crazy heap, one of them turned over on its side, and nobody was paying the least attention to them

or to a man who crawled out of one of them and promptly lost himself in the crowd, fleeing like the rest from the same unseen thing. Then Danny saw a girl struggling in the overturned car, trying to get out. And not one soul offered the least assistance. There was, too, a tiny wisp of smoke coming from under the hood. Fire. . . .

ON THE INSTANT Danny leaped for the door. He was, of course, a reporter for the *New York Tabloid*. But also he was a human being. He flung himself down the steps in headlong dives which beat any time the elevator could have made. He arrived at the bottom with an attained velocity which sent him hurtling out through the big doorway into the street.

And even in the short time he had taken to descend four flights, the crowd had thinned. Where it had filled the street from one side to the other, now there was only a trickle of running, gasping figures. Danny saw a flare-up of flame, and dismissed all other matters until he should reach the toppled motor-car. He careened off a running figure which was panting hoarsely, each breath sounding like a croak. He raced to the car. The flame was climbing higher. It roared upward, suddenly. The girl's head projected from a window, deathly white.

"My—foot's caught!" she said

quickly, though she cringed from the mass of flame now leaping up from the hood of the toppled car. "If you can—lift a little. . . ."

Danny raced to the farther side. A two-passenger coupe, turned over. He heaved mightily at the top. It lifted. There was a tinkling of glass. He smelled gasoline, pouring out. The car was a small one, and had a ten-gallon tank under the hood. That had been punctured. Then a short-circuit had sparked. . . .

Heat seared him as the spreading vapor flared in a sudden momentary blast. The girl was scrambling up to the side of the car. She half jumped, half toppled into his arms.

He dragged her away as the fire under the hood roared furiously.

"Hurt much?" he demanded.

"I—don't know. . . ." The girl's fingers tightened affrightedly on his arm. She was not even looking at the burning car, though the heat of its blazing was fierce enough for discomfort. She was looking past Danny, in the direction from which the now vanished mob had fled. "L-look!"

And Danny turned and looked. And a Thing was coming vaguely down the very center of the street. It was round and huge. It was a caterpillar. But the fur which makes caterpillars seem so soft and downy to look at here showed as a forest-like growth of slender spik-

es; of horns each one ten feet in length. The caterpillar was yellow, and while its body might be three yards in diameter beneath its fur, those ghastly spikes reached out and filled the narrow canyon of the street to suffocating fullness. It had eyes, huge areas of an inflamed red. It had horns, which were tufts of spiky hairs. It moved with an undulating motion upon its innumerable stubby legs and now and again it lifted its forepart and seemed to gaze vaguely about. When it did so, the furry, lateral palpi before its mouth-orifice were seen to be moving indecisively. Then it settled to the ground again and moved on. Deliberate as its progress seemed, however, its rate of travel was swift. It was at least sixty feet long. It was moving quite as fast as a man could run.

DANNY LOOKED once, then swung the girl from her feet and raced across the street. Flight with a girl who might or might not be able to run was impossible. Danny reached the doorway and swung her inside it. "That—that Thing," he said unsteadily, "is too big to get in here. So—that's what the crowd was running from!"

He stared at it, unable to believe his eyes. The girl stared with him, abstractedly rubbing at her ankle. Danny swallowed.

"It might—break in," he said



unsteadily, "but I—think we can get away faster than it could break down walls. Don't you?"

The girl turned her face to him. Her expression was strange, as if she doubted her own sanity.

"I—I know what it is," she said, and swallowed. "I've—raised them, for fun. The little ones. They eat peach-tree leaves. . . ."

The Thing's head was opposite the doorway at that moment. It halted, and Danny thrust the girl behind him. The monstrous multiple eyes stared vaguely all about. Each eye was a myriad eyes, but they seemed sightless because they did not seem directed. The Thing flowed on. . . .

"Gosh!" said Danny dazedly; "And I'm supposed to be a reporter! Come on!"

He turned and raced for the elevator, the operator of which was down on his knees, praying frenziedly. Danny seized the controls and shot the car upward. As it rose with a dizzy speed, he demanded again:

"Hurt much?"

"I—don't think so," she told him unsteadily. Her mind, like his, was unable to fix itself on anything but the incredible reality they had seen. "How—what—how did that caterpillar grow? It ought to be—it ought to be an inch long! It is a giant peach-caterpillar! I'm sure! But how did it grow?"

Danny brought the elevator to

a stop. It was distinctly unskilful handling. He opened the door and had to step down a foot and a half. He helped her out.

"I've got to telephone," he said feverishly. "Got to tell the *Tabloid* about it. What was the name of that thing?"

He was rushing into the still-open door of the apartment and dialing furiously, "*Tabloid*? Give me Jeans, quick! . . . This is Burton! Big story, Jeans! There's all hell loose! Panic! Mobs running around. A big caterpillar down here, as big as a dozen motor-trucks. . . ."

"*Oh, for God's sake!*" said a weary voice on the wire. "*They're all over town. Spiders. Bugs. Everything in creation. Hanson got some pictures. How many killed up there?*"

"Panic only," said Danny concisely. "Don't know of any deaths. This caterpillar doesn't eat people. It's a sort that lives on peach-trees. Giant form of a well-known insect. I've got an expert here who's raised them."

The voice on the wire showed signs of life as Danny grinned at the girl.

"*You've got a bug expert there? Pack him in a taxi and bring him here! In a hurry! We'll have him identify the bugs. . . .*"

"It's a she" said Danny. "Hurt in a motor-car crash in the panic and can't come." He put his hand

over the transmitter and said anxiously, "I say, do you know much about bugs? I just said you were an expert on them."

"I've been doing research work in entomology," the girl told him. "You say that it's quite true that the caterpillar we saw is harmless. It eats leaves. It's a giant peach-caterpillar. It will probably smell its way to Central Park and devour the trees there. If people keep out of its way, it'll be quite harmless."

Danny relayed the information. The man at the other end came fully to life and swore bitterly because the bug expert was injured.

"I'm sending prints of the pictures we've got," he snapped. Have her identify them. Get her on the wire. Quick!"

THE GIRL TOOK the receiver. She began to ask questions. Presently she said, "That must be *Mygale Hentzii*. The American tarantula. It's a jumping spider—a hunting spider. The other's a cricket, I believe. They all seem like—gigantic forms of natural creatures. I know. . . . I wouldn't believe it, only I saw this caterpillar and recognized it. Positively. . . . Yes. . . . The *Mygale Hentzii* will jump on anything, no matter what size. I—yes—I suppose it would. . . ." She shuddered. "People will be in danger from that! . . . Centipedes? Yes. . . .

Mostly they live on flies, but they'll kill anything small. . . . Yes, they'll probably attack people, too. . . ."

Danny gnawed at his lips. Suddenly he remembered and vanished into the bathroom. He came back with a roll of bandage for the girl's ankle. She was just putting down the telephone.

"What's 'taking the baby out of bed'?" she asked puzzledly. "And what's a hundred-point head?"

"Gosh!" said Danny, awed. "Pulling out the forms! At a time like this. . . . I see! You gave him stuff the other papers won't have. What the dam' things really are, and what they'll do!"

"He said something about my name in a hundred-point head. . . ."

"Then you're famous!" said Danny. "D'you see? You're a bug expert, you've told him what the bugs are, what they live on, how to dodge them, and so on. They'll splash the news all over number three page. One will be pictures. Two the horror-stuff and casualty lists. You'll get the spread on number three. How to dodge the bugs. . . ." He stopped. "My gosh!" he said unsteadily. "I still don't believe I saw it! I wonder how many there are? He said. . . ."

"Listen!" said the girl, rather pale.

They moved to the window together. Danny opened it. There was a thin, tumultuous noise a long

distance away. Human voices. Shots. Suddenly the thin rasp of machine-gun fire. The noise went on as a faint, yapping ululation. It was not alone. Somewhere else there was another tumult. The high-pitched screams of women. . . . And somewhere else still. . .

"Oh, look!" said the girl, pointing with a shaking hand.

A great winged thing fluttered above the lighted ways of the city. It was colorful and huge. Two hundred feet across or more, its wings were banded and spotted in vast areas of vivid color. Giant legs were drawn up beneath its body. Vast, gracefully arching plumed antennae of purest gold spread out before it. And suddenly the moving beam of a searchlight seemed to streak overhead and smite the soaring thing. Its eyes glowed a vivid, dusky red. They shone like carbuncles. Like rubies.

Danny saw something vast and black and horrible leap from one building-top to another, a long distance away. But the girl's eyes were on the infinitely beautiful flying thing, soaring above a city gone mad with terror as giant insects—Monsters—made free with all its streets and ways.

"It's a Hawk-moth," said the girl softly. "A Jessamine Sphinx. It's beautiful!"

It was beautiful. But all over the city there were outbursts of ghastly

panic when some new and ever more monstrous creature appeared in a new locality. There were spiders everywhere, it seemed. Giant things which could seize upon a dray-horse as prey, and afterward crouch down leisurely beside it and extract all the juices from its carcass. There were centipedes forty feet and more in length, racing at incredible speed in quest of prey, or sometimes remaining utterly motionless as if to lure humans within reach by a semblance of immobility. And monstrous beetles lumbered here and there, and an army of tumble-bugs ten feet in length scurried about in quest of food—which could only be human beings. . . .

New York was subject to an invasion never before known to man. And New York was mad with fear.

3

WHEN DICK THOMAS came into the apartment, he found Danny and the girl debating anxiously, with photographic prints scattered over the table before them. Danny looked up.

"What did you see, Dick?" he demanded. "Talk for the press. Miss—Miss Adams—Miss Anne Adams. Mr. Thomas.—We're entomological headquarters for the *Tabloid*, Dick," he added. "Deciding what the bugs are, and dictating their habits and such over

the phone for the edification of the populace."

"I know," said Dick grumpily. "The town's gone crazy! I saw a lot of excitement, and people throwing fits in the public streets, but I've been chasing around with a camera and that new film, and I can't see a thing to photograph but a lot of panics."

Dick Thomas had, as a matter of fact undergone a not uncommon experience. Where the Monster appeared, there was chaos. But the tales told by fugitives seemed so utterly incredible only around the corner from the scene of a Monster's appearance, that there were cases of perfect calmness, of complete tranquillity, in between the areas of greatest terror. More than one adventurous soul went out to get a sight of the Monsters of which even the radios were now babbling frenziedly, and wandered for hours without encountering more than the tag-end of a panic, or seeing anything more exciting than an ambulance being loaded with victims of a crash, or watching policemen subduing some unstable individual gone insane from sheer horror. Dick Thomas had searched earnestly for the source of the tumults which made the voice of city rising toward the stars, now a frenzied ululation. And he had seen nothing whatever. He was disgusted.

"If you feel that way," said

Danny, "here's comfort. Here are some prints. Still wet. Look 'em over."

The girl was regarding Dick speculatively. He picked up the slimy, glistening photographs. He looked at one and grunted. He looked at a second. The third and fourth and fifth . . .

"Hooey!" he said. "Your filthy rag, Danny, is putting out composites! Composites! Printing photos of insects on top of photos of crowds. You didn't fall for these, did you? There are panics, yes. I've seen more cases of hysterics in the past hour than anybody outside of a madhouse ever looked at before. But these pictures—blah!"

"They're straight!" insisted Danny.

But Dick grunted and turned away. He went disgustedly into another room. He felt, at the moment, very much as a big-game hunter might feel who spent a weary day trailing a moose, only to discover that it had walked into camp in his absence and had been shot at and missed by the cook.

Danny grinned. The phone rang. He answered and talked briefly.

"Putting your dope on the air," he announced. "Your name attached. Broadcast through the courtesy of the *Tabloid*. Nothing but spiders and centipedes are to be worried about. — Hullo!"

THE THIRD OF the triumvirate occupying the apartment came in. It was Tommy Burns, of course. His clothes were torn nearly from his body, one eye was blacked, and he had one arm in a sling made out of his handkerchief.

"You are a wreck!" said Danny. "What got after you?"

"I was in Times Square," said Tommy shakily. "Lord! Suddenly the place was full of ungodly things. Then a mob ran over me, and after that a bug that looked like a baby tank chased me . . . I'm lucky to be alive!"

Silently, Danny extended the still-wet pictures. Tommy Burns looked down at them.

"That's it." He shuddered a little as he pointed. "I was right there. On that corner. I saw the beginning of the fight. I saw this Thing landing on the head of that one and they started fighting. Lord! . . ."

Dick Thomas came back. He was scowling.

"I was peeved," he said ungraciously. "Sorry. But those photos *are* composites. I'll show you. This Times Square one . . ."

"I was there!" interrupted Tommy, shivering. "I was right there!" Again he pointed. "Say! See that speck? That's me! Just as I started to run! That spider-thing jumped over my head! Lord! It couldn't have been fifteen feet

away. And was I scared?"

"Then it wasn't a fake?" demanded Danny. "This photo's straight?"

"No fake about it! I saw it all!"

"But it *is* a fake!" protested Dick Thomas. "Don't you think I know a faked picture when I see one? I know how they're done! Look here! This spider is walking a good foot above the ground in this picture. In that one he's put his foot through a bench—without hurting the bench! And that big thing, the cricket, has rolled down on the iron fence. A weight like his would crush any fence flat! But see where it seems to come out of his body? It isn't even bent by his weight! Where the picture was taken of the spider and cricket, there was no fence, nor was there any bench! And when the picture was taken of the bench and fence, there was no spider or any cricket there! There were two photographs taken at different times and places, and put together! I know what I'm talking about!"

Danny bent over the picture. He saw just what Dick was pointing out. The girl leaned over his shoulder.

"Somebody," said Dick, "cut out a picture of two bugs fighting, and pasted it over a picture of a crowd in a panic, and rephotographed the combination. That's all!"

"Only," said Tommy Burns, "it doesn't happen to be true! I was there. I'm in that photo. So were the bugs there. I don't care where they seem to be walking or what they don't mash. They were there!"

Danny put his head in his hands. Rushing footsteps sounded outside the door. A *Tabloid* photographer, with more prints, his face deathly white.

"M-my Gawd!" he gasped. "I saw  $\gamma$  what I saw on the way here! Somethin' like a mandolin on stilts, with arms like cross-cut saws! It was lookin' in third-story windows! A big giraffe. I snapped him, but—Gawd!"

"Give me your plate!" snapped Dick Thomas. "Come along! Develop it right now! I've got the stuff all ready . . ."

He had snatched the other man's camera and dragged him away to the bathroom, where his array of photographic apparatus silenced all the photographer's protests. Danny dialed swiftly. In seconds Anne was talking composedly into the phone.

"Yes . . . The beetle climbing at a wall is a picture of a sisyphus beetle. A dung-beetle. Very tiny, normally, and he will be harmless . . . That monstrous snaky-looking thing is an angle-worm, an earth-worm, one of the *Lumbricidae*. This one looks to be a

hundred feet long and ten feet thick, but it's the same creature people use for fish-bait. Harmless. The other one, that caterpillar crawling over a stalled automobile, is the caterpillar of the Tiger-moth. It's harmless too . . ."

Tommy Burns could be heard drinking thirstily. He came back, his eyes still wide with horror. Anne hung up the receiver and turned to Danny.

"Here's something," she said queerly, "I can't make out. This picture of a Tiger-moth caterpillar with a car sticking out of its body. Nobody could fake a picture like that. It's impossible . . ."

DANNY STARED at the thing. It was a picture of a caterpillar crawling diagonally across a street. It was huge; fifteen feet thick at least, and forty-five feet or more in length. And out of its body as it crawled there projected the front part of an automobile. There was no sign of a wound. There was no sign that the car was being dragged in any way. The bristles of the caterpillar's fur projected through the windshield and even through the mud-guards. But the glass, though punctured, was not crashed. The mud-guards were not bent. The car seemed incredibly to be uninjured, save that its after part was buried in the body of the caterpillar.

Dick Thomas came out, waving

a wet plate. He held it silently before Anne.

"A Praying Mantis," she said, then grew pale. "It's the most terrible, most bloodthirsty, insect in the world . . ."

The photographer flung himself at the telephone. But Dick Thomas said triumphantly:

"And it's a fake too! Look! One of its legs, that top one, is sticking right into the masonry of a building-wall! The masonry isn't disturbed! The bricks aren't hurt! And either they'd have to be crashed out, or the creature's arm would be cut off!"

Dialing the photographer said bitterly, "Say, maybe you know somethin', but I shot that picture through the back window of a taxi while it was makin' a mile in nothin' flat! The chauffeur saw that thing too, the same time I saw it! I didn't fake that picture! Hell! I was scared down to my lights!"

Danny rocked his head back and forth in his hands. The open window admitted the sounds of a city gone mad with fear. Anne took the phone to describe the habits and prey of the Praying Mantis after the photographer had told a lurid tale of being chased by the monster he had snapshot. He would return with the developed plate as soon as the taxi chauffeur recovered enough to recognize

money when it was offered him for the trip.

"I say it's faked!"

Dick was disgustedly pugnacious, but Danny shoved the print of the caterpillar at him.

"Tell me," he said harassedly, "how that one was faked, Dick! I've had to listen to enough photography from you to know this simply can't be done! How did they fake those bristles puncturing that windshield and the mudguards? The actual puncturing's impossible, but so is the faking of such a picture!"

DICK STARED AT the picture. His face went blank. He examined it more closely and more closely still. He even got a lens and went over it with an increasing bafflement.

"I don't know," he said helplessly. "It's a fake. It's bound to be! The state of things it shows is not a possible state of things! But I don't know how it was done. From a photographic standpoint, it's perfect."

Anne spoke suddenly.

"But we—most of us anyway—have *seen* those monstrous creatures. They're visible. Listen, and you'll hear the screams of people who see them. I don't think the question is whether the photographs are fakes or not . . ."

"The question," said Danny harassedly, with his head in his

hands, "is not how the photos were faked, but how photos that weren't faked could show those impossibilities! That car growing out of a caterpillar is impossible!"

"So is the caterpillar," said Anne coolly. "So are all the monsters." She pointed to a photograph. "That's a *Mygale Hentzi*, which at its biggest is an inch and a half across. This one is forty feet or more. And there are certain things about it that show it isn't a full-grown spider! Think of that! This is a cricket, which might grow to be two inches long. But this one isn't a mature specimen either, and it's fifty feet! How did these creatures come to be magnified like that?"

Danny started up.

"Magnified! Wait a minute!"

He began to pace back and forth across the room. He stopped and waved his arms. "Magnified! That's the word!" he cried excitedly. "Listen! An animal's weight increases with its bulk, as the cube of its size. But strength increases as the cross-section of the muscles. An insect is relatively strong because it's small. Enlarge it, and its legs won't be able to lift its body off the ground. A spider as big as that one"—he pointed to the Times Square Monster—"wouldn't be able to walk!"

"But it did!" said Tommy Burns. "I saw it! It jumped half a block!"

"Another impossibility," said Danny triumphantly. "The things crawl into impossible relationships with automobiles. They jump impossible distances. They are themselves impossible. They shove their legs through benches without hurting the benches. The Praying Mantis shoved its elbow into what should be a solid mass of masonry, and neither its elbow nor the masonry is hurt. More impossibility! The pictures we have of them can not possibly be fakes, yet they show an impossible state of things. What's the answer?"

"We're all crazy," said Dick skeptically.

"And so are our cameras!" Danny struck his hands together. "Now..."

The *Tabloid* photographer interrupted.

"Say," he said bitterly, "if I'm crazy, I ain't the only one. And Jeans promised me two hundred bucks to bring those pictures here. If he's crazy, he's crazy like a fox. I got to go back, too, to earn that money!"

"The thing is," said Danny, "that Dick said those pictures were taken at different times and places. He's wrong! We know that! But maybe they were taken *at one time in two places*! And the other place is magnified!"

"This business has gone to



your head," said Tommy Burns. "You're . . ."

"Amplified!" said Danny, turning upon him. "Television!"

Tommy Burns started. Then he stiffened suddenly.

"It hasn't been done," he said slowly, groping. "Three-dimensional pictures without a screen, in natural colors . . . It hasn't been done. But some day it will be done . . ."

A single voice shrieked throatily in the street outside. The photographer's taxi-driver. Danny jumped to the window as a door slammed thunderously down in the street and there was a muffled sound of some one running to hide himself in the recesses of the building.

THERE WAS a Thing coming down the street. It was shaped rather like a mandolin, save that so monstrous a musical instrument has never been conceived even by an advertising genius. Its abdomen was twenty feet in width, and from the forward part projected a slender, cylindrical body some four or five feet in diameter and nearly forty feet long, which ended in a head like that of a hypocritical dragon. Gigantic eyes a yard and a half across looked blackly all about. Its legs—monstrously saw-toothed—moved with an apparent deliberation, but its pace was swift

because of the colossal strides it took.

"We'll try it, Tommy," said Danny grimly. "It's got to be so!"

He flung up the window to its uttermost. As the Monster passed, its head only ten feet below the level of the fourth-story window, he flung a book at it, to attract its attention. Anne gasped in horror.

*But the book went through the creature's head!* The heavy volume with its fluttering leaves left no sign of its passage. Its flight was not intercepted by even a trace of resistance. And the creature seemed utterly unaware of the assault. Tommy heaved a second book. It struck squarely in the middle of the Monster's multi-faceted eye. It vanished behind those crystalline objects. They reappeared instantly. The book appeared again, falling and twisting . . .

The *Tabloid* photographer was setting up his camera. Dick Thomas vanished, to reappear with a strange camera with a lens bigger than the plate it took. And suddenly a frenzy of energy seemed to possess both Danny and Tommy Burns. They flung things through the window. They bombarded the Monster in a sort of hysterical triumph. Books, magazines, stray objects . . . Finally even a small table went hurtling through the window to penetrate the vast body of the Monster without leaving a mark or finding

any impediment in it, to go crashing on down to the pavement below.

The Monster strode on, turning its head from side to side in a queer, hypocritical inquisitiveness. It had ignored the bombardment. And it vanished.

"Now we know!" said Danny in unsteady triumph. "It's a picture! A projection! Television! An image projected in three dimensions without a screen! An illusion which even photographs! But it isn't real! It can't hurt anybody!"

He dived for the telephone. He dialed furiously. And he barked his story into the transmitter and into the ear of Jeans, at the *Tabloid* office. It was not a particularly coherent story, of course, and it was almost as incredible as the appearance of the Monsters themselves. But it held together. It checked with the fact that save for a single rumor of a man carried off by giant bees—and Anne promptly negated that possibility, as opposed to their instincts—the giant insects had ignored human beings. They had fought each other. They had preyed upon one another. They had been seen to eat one another. But there were no dead bodies of human beings save those plainly crushed and mangled by other human beings. There were no wounded, save those injured in panics. There were no missing who might not plaus-

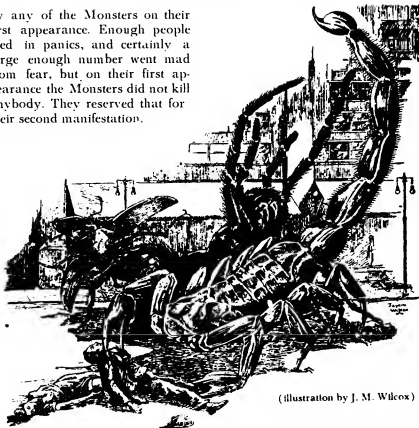
ibly be looked for in hospitals or the like. And machine-gun fire directed upon the Monsters had been wholly ineffective. They had ignored it. Had seemed invulnerable against it. Danny's tale explained it all.

THE *TABLOID* broke a story even bigger than the coming of the Monsters had been, in a series of extra editions that came off its presses like shells from a quick-firer gun. Only thirty minutes after the Monsters appeared in Times Square, it had published pictures of them battling there. At fifteen-minute intervals it had added to the luridness and completeness of its accounts, and to the number of its picturizations. Now, less than two hours after the city went mad with terrors to which the *Tabloid* had added skilfully concocted food, the *Tabloid* broke the biggest story yet:

### MONSTERS FATAL HOAX OF UNKNOWN GENIUS!

The story was wrong, of course. The second coming of the Monsters proved sufficiently that whatever the motive might be, it was not a hoax! But this headline was written after the first appearance only of the Monsters. The death-list was long, but it was exclusively a death-list from human causes. It is now thoroughly established that not one human being was actually killed

by any of the Monsters on their first appearance. Enough people died in panics, and certainly a large enough number went mad from fear, but on their first appearance the Monsters did not kill anybody. They reserved that for their second manifestation.



(illustration by J. M. Wilcox)

Within twenty minutes after Danny's call, giving the news that the Monsters were phantoms only, the *Tabloid* had the radio stations announcing the news as "exclusively from the *Tabloid*." And the third extra edition after that showed a motorcar actually driving through a monster angle-worm, with the daring human being grin-

ning as he emerged from the Monster's body. It was a shaky grin, and he got five hundred dollars for doing it after painstaking tests had proved Danny Burton had told the truth, but it was convincing. The *Tabloid's* circulation jumped phenomenally, even though there was but one "LOVE NEST RAID" headline in the whole issue, and not a single

"RUM KING" episode in any of its pages. Which constitutes a record for the *Tabloid*.

But ten minutes after the radios of the city had blared out the news that the Monsters were television products, were visible pictures in three dimensions and natural colors—just ten minutes after New York heard the news, thought it still did not believe it, the Monsters disappeared! Instantly. Like so many puffs of smoke. The Monster spider, feasting horribly in Times Square, one instant was, and then it was not. The giant yellow slug which writhed amid the uncomfortable confines of the Forty-eighth Street subway station, vanished like a candle-flame. The centipedes of forty-foot length, the scurrying tumble-bugs, the huge and gruesome creatures that leaped about the city's roofs—each one abruptly ceased to be.

One moment the city was listening incredulously to its radios saying that it could not believe its eyes; that its toll of dead had died needlessly; its mental breakdowns had no just cause. The next instant the Monsters had vanished.

The city breathed first a mighty sigh of relief, and then it went into a passion of rage against the unknown man or men who had sent the plague of terror upon the metropolis. Its hospitals were filled

to overflowing. Its morgues were crowded. Madmen screamed in terror that would never end. New York demanded the blood of those who had caused its madness. In part the demand was a thirst for revenge; but in part, too, it was still terror, because New York was still afraid.

And next morning its fears were justified. The Monsters came back. And they came back in a fashion which the *Tabloid* was again the first to tell of. Its extra early super-special three-star extraordinary edition unprecedentedly filled nearly half its front page with headlines instead of pictures. The headlines ran:

## MONSTERS RETURN AND KILL

No Longer Phantoms!

Deadly Creatures Now Actual!  
Hundreds Killed and Devoured!

The picture which filled a bare half of the front page was that of the interior of the elephant-shed in the small Central Park zoo at Sixty-sixth Street. A part of the roof of the shed was torn off. The largest of the two elephants was shown as a shrunken bulk, drained of all its fluids. Upon it squatted a monstrous, loathsome bulk. The bulk was a spider, its belly seeming swollen with the juices it had sucked from the dead elephant's body. There were a few other pic-

tures. Even the *Tabloid* could not print some of the pictures its photographers secured.

The second visitation of the Monsters had begun.

## 4

IT WAS BRIGHT and very sunshiny where Danny and Anne Adams rode in the second car of swiftly moving cortege. The day was perfect. Little cotton-wool balls of cloud drifted with a smug placidness in a sky of deepest and most improbable blue. New York; behind them, was now the scene of such horror as even the night before had not approached. But they had left before the Monsters returned, and on this smooth New Jersey road there was only a swiftly moving cavalcade of cars and a blue sky overhead and green things growing on either hand.

This was a sort of scouting expedition, following a line that Tommy Burns had mapped out the night before. He and Dick Thomas rode with Danny and Anne. They followed an army staff car, filled with men wearing Sam Browne belts and an expression of extreme competence. There were the crudely shaped, unmilitary muzzles of air-cooled machine guns sticking up over the back of that car ahead. Where Danny rode, his ribs were jabbed at by one of the innumerable gadgets Tommy Burns had

bought for his television apparatus and now had adapted hopefully for further use.

Tommy had taken Danny's analysis of the situation, the night before, not only as an explanation of what was happening, but of what might be done about it. He had thrown together some apparatus to modify his shortwave receiver and had hooked it up on a loop for directional reception. And the previous night Tommy had searched the ether feverishly in the half-hour or so between Danny's telephoned story to the *Tabloid* and the abrupt disappearance of all the Monsters. He'd found a consistent disturbance in the ether and had plotted its line. It was that line they were roughly following now. With time in which to work, he could have moved his apparatus and secured another bearing on the transmitter he felt sure projected the Monsters, but with the disappearance of the Monsters the shortwave disturbance broke off abruptly. Now he was talking un-easily:

"I know I didn't get the carrier-wave." He was nervous. Much depended on him. Too much. "It was too short for my outfit. I was getting a heterodyne, or a harmonic. And — well, that might not have come from one station. It might be a heterodyne from two stations, which might register the line to one station or the other, but also

might register the line where the heterodyning signals were most nearly equal."

Danny frowned. He hadn't Tommy Burns' knowledge of radio, but he had heard him babble of television and radio until he had absorbed some knowledge despite himself.

"The colors were all right, weren't they, Anne?"

"Absolutely right," said Anne. She looked tired, but borne up by excitement. After the vanishing of the Monsters, she and Danny had been closeted with police officials and later with representatives of the national government most of the night. As the original discoverers of the fact that the Monsters were projections of some sort, their chain of reasoning was important. Tommy Burns had been called in too, of course, and even Dick Thomas was accepted for the time as the most available expert on photography.

Danny made a vague gesture.

"Just guessing," he said doubtfully; "to project anything in natural colors means the color-screens have to be pretty closely adjusted. And two stations any distant apart would have a ticklish job synchronizing them. Besides, the Monsters weren't projections of film. They were projected images of things that were living at the time their images were amplified and put on the air. Like television.

So the chances are there was only one station sending."

Dick Thomas said curtly, "the damned things showed up in three dimensions, though. Not even as stereoscopic images. You'd have to have projecting stations at right angles to each other to get all the details. You'd have to!"

Anne said tiredly, "But there are two things I can't understand. All the Monsters were immature; small; not full-grown insects. Why? And they kept to the streets. Nobody has mentioned that. They couldn't see people, it's fairly clear. But they could see the streets and the buildings! If they sometimes walked one foot above the pavement, they never walked through brick walls. If they weren't material—and we know they weren't—why didn't they? They could!"

The car immediately behind them, an army radio-truck, began to blow its horn furiously. The car ahead checked. The whole cavalcade came to a halt. A uniformed man ran forward to the leading car. As he passed the one in which Danny rode he call, "Monsters back in New York! They're eating people! They're eating 'em."

AS MOTORS cut off, a loudspeaker in the radio truck could be heard blaring throatily. A voice was audible amid the peaceful green pine-woods, deep and hurried and nearly hysterical.

*"The Monsters have reappeared . . . Every one is warned to keep to their houses. The Monsters of last night were not actual creatures, but the Monsters of this morning seem to be. They are known to have devoured nearly all the animals in the Central Park zoo . . .*

*It is encouraging, though, that army officers say that if they can kill, they can now be killed. Last night machine-gun bullets were of no use. Today, they can hardly fail to be fatal to the Monsters. Regular troops are being moved from Governor's Island, equipped with guns, grenades, and flame-projectors . . . Since the Monsters can be attacked, now, it is only a matter of hours before they are wiped out, but in the meantime, keep to your houses! Stay indoors! Do not show yourselves at windows! Make no movements nor any noises which will draw the attention of the Monsters! Then you will be safe! More troops are being rushed . . ."*

There was a click. The loud-speaker was cut off. Somebody said in a shaken voice, "That's the general broadcast. It's lies. Here's the shortwave to Washington—and us."

A thinner, still more hurried voice began to snap crisp phrases were horrible in their significance.

*"After tearing off the roof of the elephant-shed, a Monster spider killed the larger of the two ele-*

*phants and sucked it dry. The zoo was overrun with Monsters. The rhinoceros was torn to bits by what seem to have been gigantic beetles. For the first time, giant ants have appeared. They are about four feet long and are exploring the city everywhere. Several of them have been seen carrying human beings in their mandibles . . ."*

Danny felt acutely sick.

*"No Monsters have been seen farther north than One Hundred Eighty-second Street," the voice went on crisply. "They have, however, showed themselves all the way down to the Battery. Also, no Monsters have so far appeared in Brooklyn, nor have any of them crossed the bridges. It is reported that one giant centipede, attacking the west-bound traffic on the Williamsburg Bridge, searched truck after truck for living beings, and about one-fourth of the way across the bridge suddenly vanished. It is believed that he was somehow destroyed, perhaps by coming in contact with a charged wire. His entire body seemed to lose all its members. The remains were merely a horrible mass of bloody pulp . . ."*

ANNE RAN AWAY, putting her hands over her ears. Danny remained, listening resolutely, though an unconquerable nausea filled him.

Presently he went back to the car in which he had ridden, a sickly white in color. Tommy Burns was working feverishly with his shortwave radio receiver.

"It's on again!" he panted. "My God! It's trying to blow out my tubes! I daren't tune in even the heterodyned wave clean! It would blow anything! I'm all detuned, and I've got everything shielded, and still it comes through all around the compass. Go get one of those radio men from the truck back there."

Danny jerked his thumb. Dick Thomas sprinted. Danny said sickly, "Tommy! I've got an idea! The Monsters last night were phantoms, were images, not material things. We threw things right through them, and the man who drove through that earthworm for the *Tabloid* said it was hollow inside. He could see lights. Its internal organs weren't projected. Just the outside. As if it were a balloon. So when they projected it, only the moving outside surfaces of the creature were projected. You see?"

"A mirror-image hasn't any thickness," said Danny hopelessly, "but a silvered glass ball will make images with no thickness which enclose something. Those Monsters, last night, were images with no thickness enclosing emptiness. And they weren't actual substance. It those Monsters today

were flesh and blood, they couldn't walk. They'd be too heavy! But they're walking and killing things and people. So they can't be actual substance either. They can't be! But they act like it! Tommy, how is it done?"

Tommy said, "There's power. Good God! There's more power on these short waves than I knew there could be on Earth!"

"I talked to Millikan once," said Danny hopelessly. "I interviewed him for the *Tabloid*. A bunch of us, in a sort of press-conference. I had to mess up what he said. The *Tabloid* doesn't want straight science. But he said energy — power — is just another form of matter, for substance. My head's working over its head, Tommy. I'm drowning in stuff I'm trying to get straight. But a magnetic field acts like a substance. Like an elastic band, pulling things toward itself. Or pushing them. Only it isn't a substance. And a magnetic field hasn't any surface. That's why it reaches out and pulls and pushes. Tommy, if a magnetic field had a surface, it would act exactly like a substance . . . My God, Tommy! Those damned things are killing people back in New York! They're killing them! And eating them!"

He wrung his hands. Dick Thomas came back with a man from the radio truck. The radio man was white and sick like every-



body else. Dick Thomas stared at Danny, wringing his hands.

"What you got?" demanded the radio man of Tommy Burns.

"Power!" said Tommy bitterly. "Those short waves are on and I can't tune them in for directional because if I do they'll blow my tubes. Everything! I'm tuned somewhere near a heterodyne wave now, and it was only half a meter yesterday. But if I tune it in, I'll blow everything! And I've got to tune it to locate the damned sending-station! You see?"

The radio man pulled himself together.

"Let's look." He plunged into an inspection of Tommy Burns' apparatus. It was home-made, and there were shifts which the army man, with an army man's bland indifference to expenses paid by the government, felt a sort of scorn for. But it was receiving on half a meter wavelength, and there are not many receiving-sets which can go down to half a meter. Which called for respect, too.

Anne caught at Danny's arm.

"Danny!" she cried desperately. "What's going to be done? We've got to stop it somehow. . . ."

"Have you any people back there?" asked Danny in sudden terror. He had no idea why he should be more concerned about possible relatives of Anne than any other people, but it was so. He had been with her for sixteen hours. in

which time they had talked constantly at fever-heat of things entirely apart from themselves. There had been no mention of personalities at all. But now Danny said anxiously, "How's your ankle where the car caught it? I forgot to ask."

"I'd forgotten all about it. It's all right. And I haven't any people anywhere. But Danny! How is that thing—those Monsters—going to be stopped?"

THERE WAS A milling, helpless confusion about the radio truck. These cars had started out rather hopelessly to scout along a line Tommy Burns had laid out. It had promised little to begin with. Now, with the Monsters again in New York, it promised less. It was a bearing, within three degrees, of the sending-station of the Monsters. But they had come twenty miles from New York with no sign of anything they could investigate. And a three-degree arc in twenty miles amounts to a good-sized slice of territory. Here it would be an area at least two miles wide, in any hundred-yard space of which half a dozen concealed stations might be hidden. And this part of New Jersey was wooded and not thickly settled. . . .

The men who had set out not too hopefully now listened helplessly while a loudspeaker told them that the Monsters were no

longer phantoms, but ghostly reality. While it told them of a tenement-house invaded by three of the smaller Monsters—spiders with bellies only a yard across—and of the shambles there. Of a giant Praying Mantis which stood in its unspeakable "spectral attitude" athwart a street filled with a fear-maddened mob of fugitives, and of what the giant creature did when the mob tried to flee. . . .

THE LOUDSPEAKER went on, drearily. The armed party listened helplessly, sick with rage and horror. The radio man with Tommy Burns suddenly spoke in a tone of inspiration.

"Say! Half a turn of the lead-in around a soft-iron core! That'll damp the stuff. Try that. Then a full turn if we need it. Come on!"

Danny and Anne and Dick Thomas stood helplessly in the sunlight. It seemed to them as if over the miles of distance separating them from New York they would hear the screaming noises of the city. The city, in a frenzy of despairing horror while the Monsters overran its ways, would be uttering a million-throated cry of despair. . . .

"I've got to talk," said Danny unsteadily. "I know it won't do any good. This stuff is over my head. But—I think better, talking. If—if a magnetic field had a surface, it would act like a substance.

D'you see, Dick? I'm trying to think . . . Those Monsters are projections like motion-picture projections. Only they must be television projections of living things. Something is focussed upon the city, to project amplified images of creatures in another place. . . ."

"It would take an aplanatic lens," said Dick wearily, "for depth of focus. I don't know anything about the radio stuff. . . ."

"And I said a magnetic field with a surface—a definite surface—would be like a substance except it would be invisible. . . ."

"Not necessarily," said Dick wearily. "Magnetism affects light. It shifts the plane of polarized light, anyhow. They've made cameras to photograph different stages of an electric spark by using that principle."

"Maybe—maybe it would even be visible!" Danny struck his hands together. "Something which looked like matter and felt like matter, but wasn't anything but a field of magnetism! If they could project magnetic fields, Dick! If they could! Which would have surfaces! When they were brought to focus they'd be visible, because then they'd have surfaces; and having surfaces, they'd act like substances! Out of focus they wouldn't! That's it! D'you see, Dick?"

"But they wouldn't be mater-

ial," said Anne drearily. "They couldn't eat people . . ."

"With a certain strength of field," said Danny eagerly, "they'd just be visible! Like a soap-bubble! They would reflect light as a soap-bubble does, and offer no more resistance to puncture! If those phantom Monsters had been soap-bubbles which reformed after they broke, we'd never have noticed so slight an appearance of substance! We wouldn't! A slight magnetic field, with a surface. That's all they were! And the Monsters that eat, they're fields, too, only their field is stronger. They resist puncture. They're amplified magnetic fields, images of the actual insects wherever the damned things are being broadcast from, but images which resist puncture . . ."

"How do they see people?" asked Anne wearily.

Danny was taken aback only for an instant.

"If the devils who're doing this can project a magnified magnetic-field image of an insect for people to see, why can't they project a reduced magnetic-field image of people for the insects to see—and try to devour? It's television! Television field-images of the city, in miniature, for the insects to crawl over, and television field-images of the insects to prey on the city. That's why the pictures were wrong! That's why spiders walked

sometimes a foot off the ground! Why that Praying Mantis stuck its arm into masonry! The images didn't exactly coincide! And it didn't matter, then, because the fields were weak . . ."

"Crazy," said Dick Thomas hopelessly. But Anne's eyes glowed into Danny's.

"I think—I think . . ."

TOMMY BURNS suddenly yelled with joy. "We got it! We got it! There's the line!"

There was a roar from the men who had gathered about the radio truck. Helpless, because depending upon a single bearing and that not made with any instrument of precision, they had been stunned by the messages that were coming through. Futility seemed to paralyze them. But now a new reading of the sending-station's bearing tuned their horror into rage, their feeling of helplessness into fury, and the paralysis that came of a conviction of futility turned into a hungry hatred that sent them racing to their places.

"Over there!" Tommy Burns was saying vengefully to the officer in command of the whole expedition. "That's the line, exactly! We had to take a turn and a half of the lead-in to choke down the power so we could use a directional on it. We checked up on three different wave-lengths—I think one heterodyne and two harmonics.

They all point the same way. And it can't be far! It can't! That stuff was too powerful!"

The officer had his map spread out. He was checking up by compass and his present, known location. The line, drawn on the map, was wholly clear. It started at a thread of solid black which indicated a double-width concrete road, and it went past a church, and across a space some two miles in width on which each feature of the ground was indicated with the minuteness of a modern topographical survey,

The officer had his map spread out. He was checking up by compass and his present known location. The line, drawn on the map, was wholly clear. It started at a thread of solid black which indicated a double-width concrete road, and it went past a church, and across a space some two miles in width on which each feature of the ground was indicated with the minuteness of a modern topographical survey, and then it passed through the dots, which indicated a straggling small town, and then another, and another . . .

"With the power you talk about," the officer said crisply, "they'd be fools to shoot it in concentrated form through a town. It would lose a lot and possibly start fires by heating up metal objects. So it probably isn't beyond

here" — his finger touched the first town — "and if it's a radio wave, no matter how short it is common sense says they're not broadcasting it from down in a hollow. So . . ." He traced contour lines with grim care. "The chances are it's on this particular hill. Two miles away. An isolated spot. Not even footpaths are shown on the map, here."

He blew his whistle shrilly. Men raced from the different cars and snapped to attention. He pointed out the objective.

"The chances are twenty to one that the Monsters are being produced, somehow, and flung into New York from right here!" he told them. He did not know, of course, of Danny's reasoning and conclusions. "If we smash that place, we prevent more Monsters going to New York. Here are your orders."

He gave them, very grimly and very precisely. There were six cars besides the radio-truck, and they would approach the place from six different directions.

"Use your heads," he said savagely. "I don't care how you get there. If there's resistance — and there probably will be — smash it! But the most important job any man of us ever had is smashing any electrical apparatus in that place! You can figure that every minute that's wasted costs lives behind us. Smash things! Stop

that outfit from working! Pulverize it! Now move!"

A car pulled out of line and streaked away. It had machine-guns and gasbombs, and it contained eight men. A second car roared away. The armored car—fourth in line—rumbled and growled and suddenly swung off the concrete and surged away on a dirt road which should lead it finally to meadowland and rolling hills, unwooded if the map was right. One by one, like shots from a gun, the cars flashed out of sight to take up their posts. The advance would take place from all directions at once.

"Now, wait a minute," snapped the officer. "You radio men, send this stuff back. I don't know what's waiting for us. We may not get back ourselves. Miss Adams, you'd better stay behind here. A car will probably come along and pick you up sooner or later. I don't know why you were allowed to come anyway, though you're better off than you would be in New York."

"I shan't stay back," said Anne coolly. "A car might come. But also, if Danny's right, they might be sending Monsters. He knows how the whole thing's done, now. And if they think of looking here, they can see us."

The officer stared sharply.

"If you have any ideas," he said urgently, "you'd better send

them right away. We'll be late!"

"It may be nonsense," said Danny uneasily. "But anyhow . . ." He went dubiously to the radio truck and talked doggedly into the microphone. He finished. "It's worth while trying an electromagnet on one of the Monsters, anyhow. If it's what I think, the Monster will be caught and held just as if it were a mass of iron."

"Now send my report," commanded the officer, "and then follow us if you can. Keep transmitting and telling what you see. We're off."

The two remaining cars shot into motion. A mile, two miles, and dense brush which the massive vehicles crushed beneath them. There was a tearing rattle in the air before them. A machine-gun. Suddenly there was a sharp concussion. The spitting of rifles and the dull booming of gas-bombs. And also there were one of two outcries, of men in the presence of death.

With a rush, the two cars plunged ahead. The thin brush parted and dropped behind. Then they saw the battle. It was such a battle as had never before taken place on Earth.

5

THERE WAS A long, low structure sprawling out over the top of a not very steep hill. There

was a rather old-fashioned building which looked like a dwelling-house, and an elongated addition which was much more modern. The addition seemed to have a glass roof. And there were the remnants of flower-beds, wholly neglected, and signs everywhere that this place had once been the center of a small country estate such as every New Yorker some day hopes to retire to—and can not endure when he tries it.

But that was merely the background; a sort of backdrop of peaceful open country which formed a frame for—Monsters.

When the car in which Danny and the rest were riding came careening out of the surrounding brushwood, a machine-gun was rasping fiercely over to the right. An armored car was rocking and lurching and rolling into view from the left. And three other cars were breaking cover within sight. They were plunging for the building upon the hilltop. And Monsters converged swiftly to attack them.

Nowhere did the Monsters reach such monstrous bulk as here. The giant tarantula which sprang upon the armored car had a belly like a balloon. Its legs were like masts. It covered a hundred and fifty feet in one vast leap, and then flung itself ferociously upon the car which because it moved must be prey. The armored car

crashed into the descending mandibles, a three-pounder gun booming desperately. A machine-gun—two of them—roared frantically. And then the armored car was a puny thing of crushed metal which the titanic Thing out of hell was mauling at, scratching with its monstrous fangs to puncture and drain out the juices all things which moved should possess . . .

The Monsters that whirled upon the other cars and ran with incredible swiftness to attack them were not so huge, but they were huge enough. In seconds the car to the right, racing on with spitting machine-guns, seemed to be furied beneath vast bulbous bodies which fought to seize it, and then fought each other . . . Something long and jointed arose, glistening, and waited with a cunning immobility for another car to come within its reach . . . And that car swerved madly, lurching and bouncing upon the uneven ground, and raced alongside the Monster's body, raking it with a furious blast of fire. But as it raced on, bound for the building on the hilltop, the Monster whirled like a flash and leaped after it . . . And a centipede fights not only with its jaws, but with every barbed and spiked joint of its many, many legs . . . It was standing over the overturned car when a spider leaped upon it and the two vast Monsters battled terribly above the car . . . A machine

gun began to spit hysterically from the wreckage beneath the gigantic, horrible forms . . .

THESE THINGS happened in seconds only. Danny saw them in single, isolated flashes. The terrain was alive with Monsters, of every conceivable form, of every imaginable sort of ghastliness. There were two Things fighting insanely a hundred yards ahead. There was something else feasting horribly upon the still-writhing body of something else more horrible still . . . A Monster caterpillar was flinging its body about spasmodically while a Creature all legs and hellishness slashed and slashed and slashed at it . . .

"They—can't smell," said Danny from a constricted throat. "They jump at people because they move. But they can't—smell! They *can't!*"

Anne's grip of his arm was terrified and tight. "N-no insect would attack a thing that—didn't smell like food and didn't move!" she gasped.

"If we're attacked," barked Danny, though his voice was unsteady, "if we're attacked, stop the car and everybody sit still!"

Anne screamed. A leg, a monstrous, saw-toothed leg the size of a girder for the hugest bridge ever built, descended before the car. There were other legs all about. They moved and quivered with

a horrible life. The Thing was huger than any elephant. It was huger than any imaginable animal. It was more vast than the ancient reptiles. It was unbelievable. It was impossible. It was . . .

Monstrous palpi seized the car. It stopped. The chauffeur became a frozen, unreasoning statue of pure fear. He sat with brakes on, his eyes wide and staring . . . And then there was a mighty impact somewhere near by, and a terrific, soundless battle went on above . . .

Danny had hit on the essential weakness of the Monsters as means of defense for the house upon the hilltop. They could not smell. All insects live by their sense of smell vastly more than by sight or sound. And incredible as it seemed, the slaughter of human beings by Monsters was murder done remotely. The Monsters which ravaged New York were enormously magnified images of tiny creatures many miles away. Those images possessed, not actuality, but surfaces which resisted deformation. They duplicated the movements of their minute originals. And those minute originals saw the enormously ensmallled images of people—which images also possessed surfaces—projected in their midst from many miles away. Just as the Monsters, to the

human beings in New York, lacked the attribute of sound which would have made them wholly real, so the images of human beings lacked the attribute of smell which to the insects would have made them wholly real. The tiny insects attacked the human images—and the Monster images attacked the human beings—simply because they moved; through the same instinct which makes a dog leap at a motor-car because it moves.

In a city full of people who would be hysterical at sight of the grisly creatures, the Monsters were a real and a terrible menace. When crowds saw them, they fled. When creatures fled, the Monsters attacked. But here, used as a means of defense . . .

THE UNTHINKABLE battle above the motor-car surged away. There were creatures bigger than houses in this battle to the death, fighting with an unspeakable ferocity in an absolute absence of sound. But somewhere, men made noises. There were scattered, useless shots. Somewhere a bomb went off. Then two grenades. Then a man screamed . . .

The chauffeur shrieked and bolted. He fled for the seeming safety of the woods behind. And Something soared through the air in a deadly leap and fell upon him . . .

Danny scrambled into the driver's seat.

"Keep still!" he said between his teeth. "Anne, for God's sake, don't move!"

Gigantic, multiple eyes stared down at the car. A huge, an incredible limb reached out and touched the hood. Horror bordering upon insanity filled those within it. But there were only four, now. Danny and Anne and Tommy and Dick. They were motionless; perhaps with iron self-control, perhaps paralyzed by fear.

But Danny's voice went on, steadied now and commanding. "Keep still! Keep still! The beast's just curious! We haven't any smell, to him. He'll think we're pebbles . . ."

The Thing moved away, seeking food . . . And Tommy jammed in the clutch and shot the car twenty yards ahead. But he stopped again as Something leaped . . . And the Horror felt of the car, and smelled of it, and it had no smell . . .

A machine-gun was still going desperately. But its bullets were useless. Worse than useless. The Monsters were surfaces only. Their inward organs were not projected. The bullets tore through the outer surfaces—which closed behind them!—and tore through the farther surfaces, and did not harm the actual insects. The bullets pen-



etrated only pseudo-actual images. The actual insects were in that long, low building on the hilltop . . .

It seemed that centuries passed while Danny crept toward the hilltop. A centipede crawled completely over the car, while it was still, and did not harm it. Two monstrous beetles, fighting furiously bumped into it and nearly toppled it over. Three separate times small scuttling spiders—their bellies were only feet in diameter, instead of yards—investigated the thing which had moved; their fangs bared, their fiendish small eyes glowing evilly, and went away in quest of something which both moved and smelled of food . . .

And suddenly there were no Monsters near by. A machine-gun rasped, and broke off. A revolver popped empty. Grenades and gas-bombs exploded futilely . . . But the car Danny drove was near to the long low building which looked as if it had once been the center of a country estate such as New Yorkers dream of and can not endure. No more than fifty yards to the front door. No more than thirty! There was a man by the door, watching the Monsters. He was grinning nervously . . .

"They can't come here," said Danny. His voice shook horribly. "They aren't focussed on this place. That man—I'm going to kill him! Tommy, you go in and

smash things. Help him, Dick! I'm going to kill that man . . ."

With a roar, the car leaped forward. It crashed through weedy, neglected flower-beds. It smashed down a fence. It plowed through soft ground and the man on the porch gasped frantically and turned to face them. He gaped at them incredulously. It was not possible that any living human beings could have crossed that area in which mountainous deadly things fought and battled and slaughtered every living thing . . . Then he cried out and snatched an automatic pistol into view. He fired hastily, already swinging to flee into the house . . .

And Danny leaped from the car not fifteen feet behind him and shot him down—and a man screamed horribly, off among the Monsters—and then in a cold passion that was pure horror expressed in action, Danny pumped his weapon empty into the toppling, spasmodically jerking figure. The last two shots were fired into a form that kicked convulsively upon the floor of the porch.

Then Danny stopped and picked up the weapon with which the other man had shot at him.

"He killed God knows how many people in New York," he said steadily. "Come on! There may be more of them."

THE OTHER TWO were

leaping behind him. They flung themselves at the door. It flew open with an effect of anticlimax before them. A loud humming noise beat upon them from within and they went savagely toward it, weapons out and ready.

A second door. They crashed it in. They were in a great clear space, made evidently by tearing out floors and partitions in the old-style house. There were great glass tubes in which wires and grids showed themselves distorted and strange. There was a flickering blue light which beat upon a queerly shaped grid which was black in itself, and yet seemed to emit an indefinite reddish glow, and all of this was enclosed in thick glass. And there was a huge coil, more than man-height high, from which the humming noise came. There was a feeling of power, of incredible power, quietly at work amid this humming noise. But there was no other human being in sight.

"Smash things!" said Danny, in a tone of ice. He fired at the glass plates about the blue light. A crack leaped across the glass. Air whistled as into a vacuum. The blue light grew fierce. The reddish glow became a savage flame. The humming noise from the huge coil grew louder until it was a roar, then a thunder, and then an unbearable tumult. The glass tubes glowed iridescent. The elements

within them became incandescent.

"You've shorted it!" panted Tommy Burns.

Dick Thomas flung open a door. Something stirred within it. Dick Thomas fired grimly, and a choked cry followed. He plunged in and came out again, stuffing a welter of papers and photographs into his pocket.

Nothing more there," he said composedly. "Just one man. I killed him. Let's look this way. I've picked up some photos that ought to be good."

The roar from the coil in the corner was now an insupportable din. A figure ran into view, and Danny whirled. But it was Anne.

"What's happened? Are you hurt?" Only the thin tones of her voice could be heard above the uproar, but the terror in her eyes was only for him. Danny caught her hand.

"This way!" he roared, trying to make himself audible. There was still the long, glass-roofed shed to examine. He plunged for a doorway seeming to open there. Subconsciously, he knew that the coil in the corner, from which all this din was coming, was beginning to smoke. It was heating from the passage of an unimaginable current through its winding. The roar it emitted was become a bellow. Later on, of course, it was decided that this noise came from

the alterations in the volume of its armature under a varying magnetic field. And the estimates of the magnetic field necessary to produce such changes of volume led to estimates of the amount of power available in this laboratory of the Monster-makers. But now, of course, it was merely a thing which cried out as if in anguish, and its coil smoked and heated . . .

A DOOR SLAMMED upon the uproar and lessened it a little. And now the four of them were in a place amazingly different from anything they could possibly have foreseen. It was a long shed, plank-walled and glass-roofed. There were two tables on which were flat things of shining metal, and there were gigantic frames of metal which held plates of some black substance near those tables. There were innumerable tiny boxes upon shelves along the wall, and each one was faced with wire gauze as if to serve as a cage for something very small indeed . . .

Something exploded in the room they had left. Smoke shot upward, visible through the clear glass roof. But in this long shed there was a queer, fictitious tranquility. Danny searched for human beings. There were none. Dick Thomas gripped his arm suddenly and pointed to the black plates within their frames.

"Those black things!" he shout-

ed. "They're lenses! Look at their curvature!"

"We'll smash 'em," snapped Danny. He sprang to the supports. But the supports were massive. There were micrometer-screws and vernier dials. Dick Thomas came quickly.

"Throw 'em out of focus!" he panted. "Don't destroy them! Throw 'em out of focus! That'll stop the Monsters!"

"You do it!" commanded Danny. He turned to survey the tables. Dick would know more about lenses than he would. He felt Dick moving frantically. He knew that things moved. But Danny was staring at the gleaming sheet of metal on the larger table. It was twenty feet long and five wide, and the white sheet of metal . . . was a city! A city in miniature, made all of gleaming metal!

There were streets and houses, unbelievably tiny and incredibly perfect. Windows, doors, pent-houses and even chimneys, with impossibly thread-like projections that were flagpoles, and gossamer webbings that were fire-escapes. And in the streets there were cars and trolleys, and even infinitesimal scratches that must be trolley-tracks, and specks that would be—that must be—human beings. A roughening of the pavement in what would be Union Square. A crowd. A string of specks in or-

derly array along what would be Riverside Drive. Automobiles . . .

At first glance, Danny knew that he was looking at a model of New York. But such a model! *And over it crawled a multitude of tiny insects!* Minute hunting-spiders, questing mites to devour. Baby centipedes, in search of things more helpless still. The model of New York was swarming with miniature hunters, puny demons of ferocity—and *it was the many-times magnified and amplified images of these small creatures which made the actual New York a hell of terror!*

Danny reached out his hand—and jerked it back.

"Smash those lenses, for God's sake!" he said hysterically. "I could smash the Monsters with my fingers, but I'd wreck the city doing it!"

HE HAD REACHED out his hand to kill a speck of a spider which was busy upon that narrow ribbon which was Riverside Drive. And he knew that if he did, a many-times-magnified image of his hand, with perhaps millions of times the strength he exerted, would reach down out of the sky and crush buildings, human beings, and the very ground itself!

"I've—got them off!" panted Dick. "They're heavy!"

The lenses crashed to the floor, loosened from their frames. And

suddenly a monstrous detonation sounded beyond the door through which they had entered. Flames spouted beneath the door itself. The column of smoke visible through the glass roof was a dense black cloud.

"Power's off," said Tommy Burns, his teeth chattering. "I—I saw it go! Lord! The power they had . . . We've got to get out of here! That fire's coming through!"

There was smoke already seeping into this place. Danny gazed swiftly all about. The smaller table, with its smaller set of black, opaque lenses . . . He raced to it. There, in gleaming metal, was the infinitely tiny replica of the building they stood in. Its own structure was fenced in by wire gauze. A second fence of wire gauze extended in a larger circle outside it. And between the two rings of gauze there swarmed a multitude of small and battling creatures.

"The Monsters we came through," said Danny, sick. "They projected 'em right around themselves when they saw us coming."

The smoke was thicker. Much thicker. Danny took out his penknife, suddenly, and set to work. The metal was soft. He dug. The smoke grew strangling. A door was open somewhere. There was no longer the humming roar from the coil in the other room. That was silent, now. Instead, there came a

vast crackling and the roaring of a fire feeding upon something infinitely inflammable . . . The door burned through. Tongues of flame leaped into the room.

"Come on!" shouted Tommy Burns.

Danny had stopped by the larger table. Someone materialized through the thick smoke. A hand grasped his arm. It was Anne.

"Danny!" she cried. "Come on! Come on!"

"Just a moment," said Danny. "Let me present you with the Empire State Building. I'm taking the Chrysler Building for Tommy and the Metropolitan for Dick . . ."

Seconds later they dashed out of the door as flames began to roar furiously behind them. And Danny stuffed certain fragile but perfect miniatures of giant buildings into his pockets as the commanding officer of the expedition staggered up to him. He was horribly mauled and torn.

"You — you got them?" he asked thickly. "We were — fighting the damned Monsters. Half my men are killed. More than half. But the Monsters vanished . . . You got them?"

"We did," said Danny grimly. "We smashed up the whole outfit, killed two men and . . ."

Anne wavered a little on her feet and went off into a dead faint. And Danny dropped all other matters to attend to her.

EVERYBODY KNOWS what happened next. The Monsters disappeared from New York as the laboratory on the hilltop was smashed. Danny and Dick and Tommy Burns were heroes, because they alone — with Anne — had won through the defending hordes of Monsters and smashed the Monster-makers' projector. And Dick, having swept photographs and papers from a desk in the power-station, produced documents which told of the immediate purposes of the sinister geniuses who had built and operated that place. Their immediate purpose was, of course, a vast hold-up. The City of New York was to be held to ransom. The letter making the demands of the Monster-makers was ready to mail, and it is on display in the Metropolitan Museum together with the tiny metal replica of the Chrysler Building and the Museum itself. Nobody knows how those models were made, except that Danny has suggested that if one projected a magnetic-field image of a city and then poured molten metal into its hollow interior, if the metal were sufficiently fluid it would produce a perfect casting of the city. That is probably as good a guess as any.

But nobody knows — yet — how the Monsters were made. There is just one clue available. When Danny gave Anne the Empire

State Building—some four inches tall—he put something else very carefully into a box lined with cotton-wool. Later, he put that away in a safe-deposit box which he rented at the extravagant outlay of seven dollars for the year. And Anne knows what is in the other box and why he put it away. That is the clue to the method of making the Monsters. She kissed Danny rather more worshipfully than usual when he explained it to her . . .

Oh, yes. That was quite all right. You remember, of course, that pic-

tures of Danny and Dick and Tommy Burns were in the papers for three days running, so that they became national heroes. But Danny's engagement to Anne wasn't announced until nearly two months later. And then, of course, he wasn't news any longer. The announcement filled four lines under a twelve-point head on page eight of the *Tabloid*. It fitted in neatly under the carry-over of a second-page story Danny had written. And that story went under the headline, "LOVE NEST RAID BARES RUM KING'S DOUBLE LIFE."

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## THE VOICE *(Continued from page 77)*

"Do you remember," said Bob, "how the necks looked to be horribly gnawed or torn—just as that awful 'westernmost row' would have looked, when the bodies were exposed, with the action of the waves eating them away?"

So we put away the books and left the building, deep in conjecture; and to this day we cannot quite decide whether we saw the spirits of the unfortunates of whom we had read; or whether some spell had been cast upon that district on account of the horrors that had been enacted there, and in a sort of trance our subconscious minds had seen these things.

Perhaps, because the Lascar's depredations had been read of by us and we had seen and followed him, his ghoulish wraith was scared away from that vicinity: and perhaps the phantom of the shackled prisoner received from us a psychic reaction and knew we had discovered that his lost landmark was no more; and so, realizing it never could be found again, he gave up seeking.

Let the reason be what it may, this I know: that, though we have since covered the old ground by the Navy Yard several times, never again have we seen a sign of that huddled, searching figure with the wounded face and manacled wrists, nor of the dreadful specters in that rotting building, nor of the fleeing Lascar who had robbed the dead.

# Coming Next Issue

Alan, who had made straight for the Picture, regarded it with angry incredulity.

"It was a clear late afternoon scene when I left it. There was no figure. Just bare spring landscape. Now the man's back in it again! He was right up in the mist when I first saw this infernal thing; I thought it a clever dodge of the painter—that solitary figure emphasized the vast desolate moor. No—look at that, will you!"

The two stared. On the road, not a mile from the entrance-gate to Gorm, and facing toward it, a man's figure was painted. Insolently, he seemed to dominate the lonely Glen, and his uncovered head burned red as fire under leaden skies.

Alan's face set like a mask. With loathing, he noted the changed aspect of the Picture, its gloom and shadow and brooding horror; a scene from Dante's purgatory rather than the living, burgeoning Earth.

"Even the star is in it again," he muttered. "The Dark Star."

"The star is Red Alastair's signal, then! A sort of challenge." . . . Broome stood regarding the Picture . . . "You consider this the work of a man, some tremendous work of genius?"

The other looked at him, his lean face, his black eyes, cold, furious, implacable. "It's a trick, a damnable hellish trick—to put the wind up—to unnerve me. Why not? He's had two hundred years to learn, to practice his infernal game."

*You Won't Want To Miss This Tale Of Immortal Love  
And Hate*

## THE DARK STAR

by G. G. Pendarves

# It Is Written...

Jack Williamson's novelet, *Wolves of Darkness*, is turning out to be the most controversial story we have run in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*; at the time I am typing this, nearly two thirds of the votes received have been extreme reactions—either a "O", indicating that the reader thought the story outstanding, or an "X" indicating positive dislike. Of these extreme reactions, two thirds are presently in favor.

This being the case, let's give the (present) minority a chance to speak up first. I can only select representative views from each side, but *Dorothy Rogalin*, whose ballot was the first to arrive this time, puts the case quite clearly: "I didn't like *Wolves Of Darkness* because it was too long and crowded out other shorter stories, possibly good stories. As far as I am concerned, the horror could have been condensed into ten pages, and that would have sufficed. The hero was much too stupid—he should have figured, at the very beginning, that light from matches, etc., would immobilize the monsters. Altogether, the horror just dragged on and on and got boring. Then, the hypnosis bit was silly somehow. For me, the unbelievableness was set at the beginning and there was little left to read such a long story for."

Miss Rogalin also did not care much for the cover or for *In Amundsen's Tent*, but had high praise for *Transient and Immortal* and *The Ultimate Creature*. I've been watching to see if any such sort of pattern would show up among the others who disliked the Williamson novelet; once in a while this will happen. It hasn't this time, although one reader who detested the lead novelet considered Jim Haught's tale outstanding. It's entirely natural of course to find a long story that you do not enjoy too long, and to feel that it's unfair to crowd out other stories you might have liked. Needless to say, no one who loved *Wolves of Darkness* thought it was too long!

I see now that only one other person who disliked the story said much of anything about it. *Charles Hidley* writes: ". . . The Williamson is agonizing! I've been at it for three nights and still have twenty pages to go. What a blessing that old Jack changed his tune later on.

"The highlight of the issue—and it's a beacon—is *The Ultimate Creature*, beautifully written and novel in approach. This is an author whose name I'll search out in the future . . . The Wesso illustration was fun; was it the cover to the magazine? It has



a 'tighter' look to it than the old drawings."

We have another story by R. A. Lafferty, which you will see in a future issue of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*—where *The Ultimate Creature* should have appeared, in the viewpoints of those who cared less for it . . . Yes, the Wesso illustration was his cover for the January 1932 issue of *STRANGE TALES*. The picture had to be trimmed a little (really not much) in order to avoid the type on it and to eliminate places where the worst erosions of time had made their mark on my copy. Some scratches are still visible. Friend Hildley also had a low opinion of *In Amundsen's Tent*, but praised the cover.

Now to give the (present) majority opinion a voice, *Gene D'Orsogna* writes: "Your choice of stories was, to my mind, nothing short of superlative. I must confess I approached Jack Williamson's *Wolves of Darkness* with a closed mind. How, I thought, can there be anything new in the realm of lycanthropy? Between Seabury Quinn (*The Phantom Farmhouse*, *The Blood-Flower*), Greye La Spina (*Invaders From The Dark*, *The Devil's Pool*), and numerous others I considered the field 'closed' to any other variation. The perfect intermingling of science fiction and pure grue made for a pulsatingly vital tale.

An unidentified preference page reads, in part: "*Wolves of Darkness* by Jack Williamson, was terrific. I was spellbound reading it. I didn't want to put the story down for a moment—it was

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great. I would like to see more stories like that in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*." This reader felt, however, that the Lafferty story was out of place in MOH.

*In Amundsen's Tent* has not thus far drawn any positive dislike, and but one "outstanding" designation, but more than two thirds of the voters gave it a "1" or "2" rating, and most of those who found the Williamson novelet outstanding gave the Leahy story a "1". Readers *Hidley* and *D'Orsogna* sum up between them the case against the story: *Charles Hidley* writes: "*In Amundsen's Tent* was a drag 30 years ago with the twas's and forsooths, and even under the cloak of 'camp', it just won't do. Never could understand its mythic hold on readers." And it would seem that those who didn't like the story on first reading have not found it to have improved with age. *Gene D'Orsogna* says: "*In Amundsen's Tent* was a good story, but, I fear time has blackened its eye. At the time

of the conception of this yarn, the Antarctic, if I am not mistaken was relatively unknown. Thus, the very words 'south pole' brought about a sense of wonder. Today, this region of the globe is somewhat well trodden, thus dissipating the sense of horror. Add to this the fact that H. P. Lovecraft made the entire continent his own in *At The Mountain of Madness*, and you come up with an action-packed, but not terribly frightening story."

One reason why dates are often mentioned in these old stories is so that the reader can mentally put himself back in time to a point where the now-known was unknown. I do not think that the datedness of the Leahy story, or even the fact that Lovecraft later took command of the Antarctic for horror, is really the reason why those who did not care for *In Amundsen's Tent* found it unsatisfactory—unless such readers could not enjoy any story at all which could have taken place only when various things now known were un-

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known or various things now recognized as false were believed to be true. My feeling is that, for these readers who point to the datedness as an explanation, the real reason is that the author failed to suspend their disbelief and that 'Friend D'Orsogna might not have cared much more for the story back in 1928 had he read it then.

Ray Reistoffer notes on a preference page: "Even though some are reprints, I also liked the interior illustrations, especially Wesso's for *Wolves of Darkness*. I hope you keep running them . . .

"I'm glad to see that you are bi-monthly again. MOH is the only magazine that I eagerly look forward to . . ."

All the artwork in our magazines is reprint, although we did use some new artwork on some of the covers. Fred Wolters did the "dripping blood" logo and cover design we used for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* #6 and 7, and illustrated Ray Cummings' *The Dead Who Walk* for the cover of #8, and H. F. Arnold's *The Night Wire* for #9. Cark Kidwell illustrated Villers de L'Isle Adam's *The Torture of Hope* for #10, and Graye La Spina's *The Devil's Pool* for #11. Gray Morrow painted the cover illustrating Robert Bloch's *The Faceless God* for #12. Hubert Carter did the pictures for the covers of #s 13 and 14. From #15 to the present, we have purchased one-time reprint rights to various black-and-white drawings by Virgil Finlay.

Hubert Carter designed the logo for *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* and *FAMOUS SCIENCE FIC-*

## Have You Missed These Issues?

#1, August 1963: *The Man With a Thousand Legs*, Frank Belknap Long; *A Thing of Beauty*, Wallace West; *The Yellow Sign*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Maze and the Monster*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, Ambrose Bierce; *Babylon: 70 M.*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Inexperienced Ghost*, H. G. Wells; *The Unbeliever*, Robert Silverberg; *Fidel Bassin*, W. J. Stamper; *The Last Dawn*, Frank Lillie Pollock, *The Undying Head*, Mark Twain.

#2, November 1963: *The Space-Eaters*, Frank Belknap Long; *The Faceless Thing*, Edward D. Hoch; *The Red Room*, H.G. Wells; *Hungary's Female Vampire*, Dean Lipton; *A Tough Tussle*, Ambrose Bierce; *Doorslammer*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Electric Chair*, George Waight; *The Other One*, Jerry L. Keane; *The Charmer*, Archie Blinn; *Clarissa*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*, Rudyard Kipling.

#3, Feb. 1964: Out of print.

#4, Sept. 1964: Out of print.

#5, September 1964: *Cassius*, Henry S. Whitehead; *Love at First Sight*, J. L. Miller; *Five-Year Contract*, J. Vernon Shea; *The House of the Worm*, Merle Prout, *The Beautiful Suit*, H. G. Wells; *A Stranger Came to Reap*, Stephen Dentinger; *The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing*, Walt Liebscher; *Bones*, Donald A. Wollheim; *The Ghostly Rental*, Henry James.

Order From Page 128

**Have You Missed These Issues?**

#6, November 1964: *Caverns of Horror*, Laurence Manning; *Prodigy*, Walt Liebscher; *The Mask*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Feminine Fraction*, David Grinnell; *Dr. Heidegger's Experiment*, Nathaniel Hawthorne; *The Pacer*, August Derleth; *The Moth*, H. G. Wells; *The Door to Saturn*, Clark Ashton Smith.

#7, January 1965: *The Thing From-Outside*, George Allan England; *Black Thing at Midnight*, Joseph Payne Brennan; *The Shadows on the Wall*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Phantom Farmhouse*, Seabury Quinn; *The Oblong Box*, Edgar Allan Poe; *A Way With Kids*, Ed M. Clinton; *The Devil of the Marsh*, E. B. Marriott-Watson; *The Shuttered Room*, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.

#8, April 1965: *The Black Laugh*, William J. Makin; *The Hand of Glory*, R. H. D. Barham; *The Garrison*, David Grinnell; *Passeur*, Robert W. Chambers; *The Lady of the Velvet Collar*, Washington Irving; *Jack*, Reynold Junker; *The Burglar-Proof Vault*, Oliver Taylor; *The Dead Who Walk*, Ray Cummings.

Order From Page 128

Coming Next Issue

NASTURTIA

by Col. S. P. Meek

TION, and did the cover picture for SMS #1. Carl Kidwell did the picture for the second issue; from issue #3 to the present, we have used Finlay.

Virgil Finlay's artwork has also appeared in the first four issues of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*; while the 5th issue has an illustration by Frank R. Paul.

While I liked Kidwell's drawings, the active readers did not care for them on the whole; the approval of the Finlay drawings has been much more definite. It is not yet economically feasible for us to order new artwork from top artists in the field, and new artwork from others has proved to be less effective than the Finlay series.

While many readers have expressed delight at our return to bi-monthly publication, approval has not been unanimous. *David Charles Paskow* writes: "It is reassuring to have MOH back on a subscription basis, even though I doubt that you'll be able to maintain your planned bi-monthly schedule. The only successful bi-monthly issues were number 8 through 10, way back in 1965. Why not continue on a quarterly basis (an odd request, I'll grant, from a long-time fan of MOH)? That way, when *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* are firmly established quarterlies, you'd be issuing one fiction title per month. I don't want to seem pessimistic, but I also don't want to see quality sacrificed for quantity."

MOH was supposed to be a bi-monthly magazine at the start, and it was the printers' difficulties which

prevented our starting out that way in 1963. We finally made it, but by then distribution troubles had limited our circulation to the point where we just had to allow for a longer sales period. Distribution is still very far from ideal, but there has been improvement and circulation now allows us to try to see if bi-monthly appearance is a good idea.

Being far from perfect, I'm not going to be able to keep each and every issue on the highest level; from the viewpoint of any particular reader; but now I'm haunted by the feeling that the next time one sinks, according to your lights, Friend Paskow, that you will attribute it to the bi-monthly schedule. Actually the reasons for this are reasons which would operate no less on a quarterly schedule.

Jack Cordes writes: "Here are a few notes that may prove of interest to Greg Bear of San Diego, California. His letter in the November issue mentioned that he ran across two copies of *The Double Shadow and Other Fantasies* by Clark Ashton Smith.

"I last saw this booklet offered for sale two years ago and the price was \$10. Probably would be double that today. Mr. Bear made a nice find indeed.

"In an autobiography dated 1936, Smith stated that he financed the printing of *The Double Shadow and Other Fantasies* and that the six stories in it were his best. If I am correct in assuming that Smith's fiction was largely completed by 1936, then the booklet would be a doubly valuable item.

"My copy was also edited and

### Have You Missed These Issues?

#9, June 1965: *The Night Wire*, H. F. Arnold; *Sacrilege*, Wallace West; *All the Stain of Long Delight*, Jerome Clark; *Skulls in the Stars*, Robert E. Howard; *The Photographs*, Richard Marsh; *The Distortion out of Space*, Francis Flagg; *Guarantee Period*, William M. Danner; *The Door in the Wall*, H. G. Wells; *The Three Low Masses*, Alphonse Daudet; *The Whistling Room*, William Hope Hodgson.

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Heddon's*, Pauline Kappel Prilucik; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Flacide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

#11, November 1965: *The Empty Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hau Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse) Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Greya la Spina.

### Order From Page 128

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See page 128

## Have You Missed These Issues?

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Muncing*, *Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Denstination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredit*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

#14, Winter 1966/67: *The Lair of Star-Spawn*, Derleth & Scherer; *The Vacant Lot*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *Proof*, S. Fowler Wright; *Comes Now The Power*, Roger Zelazny; *The Moth Message*, Laurence Manning; *The Friendly Demon*, Daniel DeFoe; *Dark Hollow*, Emil Petaja; *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Monster-God of Mamurth*, Edmond Hamilton.

#15, Spring 1967: *The Room of Shadows*, Arthur J. Burks; *Lillies*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Flaw*, J. Vernon Shea; *The Doom of London*, Robert Barr; *The Vale of Lost Women*, Robert E. Howard; *The Ghoull Gallery*, Hugh B. Cave.

Order From Page 128

proofread. I had always assumed Smith did this himself and later I received confirmation of it. In 1952 I sent him a copy of *Genius Loci and Other Tales* for an autograph. He not only autographed it but also edited and proofread the entire book.

"No serious complaints about the November issue of MOH. Here are my ratings: 0—*In Amundsen's Tent*; 1—*Wolves of Darkness*; 2—*Out of the Deep*; 3—*The Ultimate Creature*; 4—*The Bibliophile*; 5—*Transient and Immortal*.

"I've read *In Amundsen's Tent* several times down through the years and it still has power over me. It's a real classic.

"I imagine Jack Williamson would agree with me when I say *Wolves Of Darkness* isn't exactly a masterpiece. It reflects the budding strengths (as well as the weaknesses) of a fine writer learning his craft. He seemed to have a particular fondness for the words "orbs" and "preternatural."

"These 'lost' Howard stories that keep turning up are interesting, but certainly no more than that. Howard was one of the greats and I suppose you're doing us a service by bringing these items to light, but I can't help feeling that they should be left to molder away in the darkness. This isn't the Howard I know.

"Lafferty wrote a good yarn in *The Ultimate Creature*. To be honest, I haven't cared much for the new stories in MOH, but this one was an exception.

"Like you, I'm wondering where I've read *The Bibliophile* before. Not too bad a story.

"I couldn't help feeling that *Transient And Immortal* should have been a novel. I mean that seriously. Too

much compressed into too few pages."

Oh, I wasn't in any doubt where I had read something like *The Bibliophile* before, and would have spotted the resemblance to Dr. Keller's *Bindings De Luxe*, even if Bill Blackbeard had not alerted me to them in the letter he sent along with that issue of the magazine containing the Boyd story. I just didn't want to risk giving anything away in advance—although since no reader has mentioned the Keller story, I may have been over-cautious. But no harm was done, if even I was needlessly reticent, while harm could have been done the other way.

I entirely agree that more can be done with *Transient and Immortal*; yet, even as it stands, the story has an appeal which I found irresistible and was sure that not a few others would. While we are not in business for the purpose of encouraging new writer, or primarily to give a newcomer a chance to benefit from this sort of comment, I see no reason for not letting this come about as a by-product so long as it seems that some measure of pleasure can be afforded to a substantial percentage of our readers in the process. Sometimes I'll guess wrong—and the comments have shown that I have in the past. But the feelings expressed by the great majority of readers—and perhaps even more by the numbers who pick up one issue of MOH and then start sending in orders for back copies; but not writing me letters—show that a pretty fair batting average has been maintained by your not too humble but reasonably obedient servant, RAWL.

### Have You Missed These Issues?

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#17, *Fall 1967: A Sense of Crawling*, Robert Edmond Alter; *The Laughing Duke*, Wallace West; *Dermod's Bane*, Robert E. Howard; *The Spell of the Sword*, Frank Aubry; "Williamson", Henry S. Whitehead; *The Curse of Amen-Ra*, Victor Rousseau.

#18, *November 1967: In Amundsen's Tent*, John Martin Leahy; *Transient and Immortal*, Jim Haught; *Out of the Deep*, Robert E. Howard; *The Bibliophile*, Thomas Boyd; *The Ultimate Creature*, R. A. Lafferty; *Wolves of Darkness*, Jack Williamson.

#19, *January 1968: The Red Witch*, Nicztin Dyalhis; *The Last Letter From Norman Underwood*, Larry Eugene Meredith; *The Jewels of Vishnu*, Harriet Bennett; *The Man From Cincinnati*, Holloway Horn; *Ground Afire*, Anna Hunger; *The Wind In The Rose-Bush*, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; *The Last of Placide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *The Years are as a Knife*, (verse) Robert E. Howard.

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